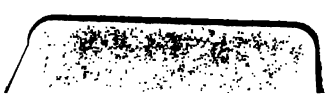

Prodigal Daughters

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By

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NEW YORK CHICAGO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 North Wabash Ave.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 75 Princes Street

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be changed, while the children will have grown almost beyond recognition."

If ever a man looked eagerly forward to his return home it was Lester Trelawney. He had been away from home for six years. Even before the outbreak of the war, his regiment having been sent to Egypt, he had to bid good-bye to his wife and children, almost without warning or time for preparation.

From the time he landed at Alexandria, his life had been one continual excitement. Owing to a strange series of happenings, he had, before he had time to settle down in Egypt, been ordered to India, where he found himself in a centre of unrest and danger. For nearly two years he practically lived from hour to hour. Events, of which the British public knew nothing, happened thick and fast, and as he proved himself not only a brave soldier, but a man of more than ordinary intelligence, he was entrusted with work which was not only vitally important, but terribly exacting.

At the end of his work in India, he was sent to Mesopotamia where, after a good deal of strenuous work, he had been taken prisoner. Here, in a foul smelling den, he had been taken ill, and practically gave up all hope of ever seeing his home again. A sound constitution, and a dogged determination not to be beaten, however, carried him through. Not only did he get well, but he managed to escape from his jailers. Added to this, he was able to pick up information of such value that when at length he was enabled to rejoin the Army, he became especially marked out for intelligence work. This led to his being sent on various missions, which, although engrossing beyond words, kept him from returning home.

For months together, Lester Trelawney was away from civilization. This led, on more than one occasion, to his wife and family giving him up for dead. Even when at [illegible]th the Armistice was signed, he was still kept in the

East. Through the years he had gained such experience, and his work had become so exacting, that no one else could be entrusted with it.

"Trelawney, is that you?"

He turned and saw a man who had just emerged from a cabin.

"Why—yes, it's Wykham. I *am* glad to see you."

"Not more glad than I am to see you. Heaven only knows how much good honest sorrow I've wasted over you. You've been given up for dead twice. Of course something of the truth has come out about you. If I had had the slightest idea you were aboard, I wouldn't have stayed in that stuffy cabin. Let's see, you've not been home since '14, have you?"

"No."

"Beastly shame, I call it. Still you've brought it on yourself. If you will make yourself indispensable, you have to pay the price for it. But you are all sorts of a big gun now, I can tell you."

"Hardly. Only a Colonel."

"But you'll be more than that—a Brigadier for certain."

The other shook his head. "I'm not troubling about that sort of thing," he replied; "my one thought is to see my wife and children."

"Of course, of course. By Jove, you'll be a bit excited, although you look as cool as a cucumber. Why, it's nearly six years since you left."

"Yes, six years," and there was a far-away look in his eyes.

"I saw your wife a few weeks ago."

"Did you?" Trelawney looked questioningly at the other.

"Yes. She looked scarcely a day older. The change will not be in her. It will be in the children. How many have you?"

"Four. Two boys and two girls. The youngest, Peggy, was barely eleven when I left. The eldest, Trevor, was just over seventeen when the war broke out."

"And now he's twenty-three. By Jove, you *will* find a change. There, we're slowing down. We shall be in the harbour in another three minutes. We'll go up to London together, eh?"

"I can't promise," replied Trelawney. "I sent word to my wife that I was coming by this boat. She may be here to meet me."

"Oh, yes, of course. Well, the best of luck! I expect I shall be seeing you often now you are back again."

A few minutes later the boat had entered the harbour and Colonel Trelawney was looking eagerly towards the pier, as if in expectation of seeing some one he knew. Presently his eyes lit up with a look of gladness.

"There she is," he said aloud, and then turned to his man and gave him instructions about his luggage.

Lester Trelawney was utterly unconscious of the crowd of onlookers as he passed along the gangway. He had seen a face which made him forget, not only the past years of peril, and excitement, but all his surroundings.

"Alice, my darling, it is good of you to come," he murmured as he held a little woman in his arms, and kissed her many times. "There, don't cry, little wife. I'm back safe and sound."

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I'm so—so—oh, thank God you've come!"

She was a small-featured but pretty woman, in spite of the fact that she was past forty. There was scarcely a line on her face, and not a single gray hair among her golden locks. She seemed almost pathetically little and fragile as she looked into her husband's face, and one could easily imagine that the lonely soldier had had many anxious hours at the thought that this clinging woman was alone with the cares of a family weighing on her.

But that was all forgotten now. The war was over, the years of terror had passed, and he was home again.

"Oh, Lester, I'm so proud, so thankful, so happy! You are sure you are all right?"

"Sure, Alice," he laughed. "There, I'll try and find an empty carriage."

"I bribed the conductor to reserve one for us," and a blush surmounted her cheek as she spoke. "I thought—I thought ——"

"Yes, I know what you thought," interrupted Trelawney joyfully. "Alice, this hour almost repays one for all the years we've been separated. There are thousands of questions I want to ask you, and heaps of things you'll have to tell me. The children are all right, I hope?"

He asked the question in a matter-of-fact way, but it was easy to see how much it meant to him.

"Yes, they are all right. Of course Trevor isn't at home, but the girls are both all right. You'll hardly know them. Those photographs I sent you hardly gave you an idea what they are like. Eleanor is a head taller than I—she's twenty-one, you know,—while Peg, as you always called her, has her hair up."

"Fancy, my little Peg with her hair up!" Trelawney sighed as he spoke. "Then she'll be quite grown up."

"Yes, quite; she's a lot older than her age. Oh, I *am* glad you are home again. I don't think I could have gone on much longer without you."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no, nothing at all. But—oh, I *have* wanted you!"

They were alone in the compartment at length, and again Colonel Trelawney took his wife in his arms, and held her close to him. Evidently the years had not cooled his ardour, nor had his affection for his wife lessened. Nevertheless there was a tone in her voice that made him anxious, *especially* when he asked her about

the children. As he looked at his wife again, moreover, something struck him which had not troubled him before. She seemed to him to lack decision, and steadiness of purpose. She was a loving, gentle little creature, but she was weak, and lacking in that power of command which had been of such value to him during the last fateful years of his life.

"Ah, well, I hope I am home for good now," he replied gently. "Oh, my little wife, you have not wanted me half as badly as I have wanted you."

She nestled up closely to him, like a tired child nestles to its mother, and sighed contentedly.

"I never wanted you so much as during the last two years," she said. "You see the children seemed to grow up suddenly, and—but oh, John has been such a comfort to me!"

"John?"

"Yes, I know you used to think him dull, and a little bit sullen, but he isn't at all. He's rather quiet still, and reserved; but he's as steady as old times, and so thoughtful. Do you know I've had to consult him about everything, especially since he left school. As soon as he knew the state of my finances, he wouldn't hear of going to Oxford. You see, Trevor's pay hardly covers his expenses. Boys in the army *have* to keep up appearances, you know."

"Then what's John doing? I fully intended him to go to Oxford."

"Perhaps I ought to have told you. But the boy wouldn't let me. He said it would bother you. As I told you, Trevor, being in an expensive regiment, had to come to me for help, so John insisted on helping me."

"Insisted on helping you? How?"

"The father of his principal chum at Rugby is in the motor business, and John, who, as you know, always had a passion for engineering, went to him and asked him for

work. He's been there a year now, and is doing splendidly. Mr. Davenport gives him a salary, and is so pleased with him that he has promised him quite a good position in a few months."

Colonel Trelawney looked thoughtful. He was not a rich man, but he had thought that his private income, added to the amount he had arranged for her out of his army pay would be ample for all the wants of the family. Indeed this was one of the things that comforted him when he was far away from civilization, and when it seemed doubtful whether he would ever see his family again. His house in Hampstead was not large, but it was his own property, and he had never dreamed that his wife would have to face financial difficulties.

"You see everything has become so dear," went on Mrs. Trelawney. "Prices are simply awful, and although school bills have stopped, the girls have had to have more expensive dresses, while, as I told you, Trevor has had to be helped. Of course Eleanor earned a good deal."

"Eleanor?" cried the Colonel in a tone of questioning surprise.

"Yes, she got a post under Government. Everybody did it during the war, you know; but that's over now. Still it has given the girls all sorts of notions."

Trelawney was silent. He was an understanding man, and although he spoke no word, it was easy to see that he read more in his wife's words than she had voiced.

"Poor little girl," he said at length. "I'm afraid you've had a difficult time, and I have been so wrapped up in my own affairs that I have not realized how you've been placed. But never mind. I'm home now, and together, we'll soon have everything straight."

"I'm sure I've tried very hard to do what I thought you would like," said Mrs. Trelawney. "But I never realized how helpless I was until I was left alone. You

CHAPTER II

"THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH"

ALTHOUGH Colonel Trelawney's house was not a large one, especially when compared with those in that part of Hampstead Heath in which it was situated, it had a spacious, comfortable appearance. The garden surrounding it added to its attractiveness, and made it appear more homelike. Indeed, when the taxi stopped, and Trelawney got out and looked around him, it seemed a very haven of rest to a homesick man.

"It's just beautiful," he sighed contentedly, "just as I have thought of it during six lonely years."

But all thoughts of house and garden passed from him in a moment, for he heard the sound of voices, and the scamper of feet. A second later the door was opened, and he was met by two girls who rushed towards him.

"Why, Eleanor," he cried, as he kissed the older, and taller of the two, "I shouldn't have known you. And, by Jove, you are a pretty girl too. As for little Peg; why, you young puss, what have you done with yourself?"

"Like Topsy, 'I'se growed,'" replied the girl.

"You *have* 'growed.' You make me feel an old man. You were a racketty, untidy kid when I left and now you are far taller than your mother. Still you are Dad's baby, aren't you?"

"Not much of a baby about me," retorted the girl saucily.

They were both good-looking girls. Eleanor, the older and taller of the two, had almost classical features, and

a striking appearance generally. Peggy, the younger, although not yet eighteen years old, had a fine well-developed figure. Both were attired in the latest fashion; each of their dresses was cut very low at the neck, while their skirts were so short that they exhibited much more of their lower limbs than their grandmothers would have considered necessary.

Colonel Trelawney's quick, observant eye took all this in at a glance, but he made no remark. Indeed, he was so happily excited that details of dress counted for little.

"But where's John?" he asked.

"Here, Father," said a youth coming forward. "I only wanted to give the girls the first chance."

He was a quiet, thoughtful looking young fellow, just turned nineteen. There was a family resemblance between him and the girls, but there was something in his face which suggested a difference of character. He seemed more reposeful—more trustworthy.

Colonel Trelawney hesitated a moment, and then he put his arm around his shoulder and kissed him.

"God bless you, my boy," he said fervently.

John blushed a fiery red, while Peggy tittered. He was a sensitive fellow, and like other boys of his age, was not given to open manifestation of his feelings.

"Your mother has told me about you," went on the Colonel. "Of course I'm immensely pleased that you've been wanting to help your mother. All the same, I'm sorry you didn't go on to the 'Varsity."

John shuffled awkwardly, and was silent. He had been steadily watching his father ever since he had entered the house, as if trying to make up his mind about him.

"But he's been such a comfort to me," interposed the mother. "I don't know what I should have done without him."

John looked more uncomfortable than ever, while Peggy laughed aloud, and then burst out singing.

"Our John's a pattern boy, a pattern boy,—a pattern boy.

"Our John's a pattern boy,—yes a pa-a-ttern boy!"

"Do be quiet, Peg," he exclaimed.

"But you are," laughed the girl, "and it's only right Father should know it."

"Ah, well," broke in the Colonel, "it's good to see you all, even although I can't realize, even yet, that you are no longer children. But I must get used to that. In the meanwhile we will have a great time together. After I've settled up a few things, I'm going to have a complete holiday. Come, you girls, kiss your old Dad again, and then we'll have dinner. Mother told me she'd arranged to put it off till I came home, so you'll be hungry."

"We are," assented Peggy.

"Dinner will be ready in five minutes," Mrs. Trelawney informed them.

"Then I'll have a wash in the meantime," said the Colonel. "Oh, my little kiddies, God only knows how I've longed for this hour."

He found his way up-stairs as he spoke, while the two girls exchanged significant glances. Eleanor had scarcely spoken a word since her father's first greeting, but she had never taken her eyes from him. She might have been trying to understand what kind of man he was. John was also silent, but the look in his eyes as he watched his father go up-stairs spoke volumes.

During dinner the gathering was somewhat subdued. Possibly the fact that the head of the house sat at the table had a restraining influence. After all, they were children when he went away, and for six years his controlling hand had been taken away from them. During that time Mrs. Trelawney had been solely responsible for everything, and she had, on her own confession, felt the burden of that responsibility very heavily.

More than once Colonel Trelawney looked searchingly

from one face to another. The experience was as strange to him as to his family. To leave four children, to be for several years separated from them, and then to return home, and find them changed almost beyond recognition made him feel almost like a stranger in his own house. His wife only had remained the same. The years of absence had scarcely changed her at all. She was the same loving unselfish creature he had always known her to be; but the children puzzled him.

He did not pass any judgment, however. He was still under the excitement of his home-coming, and he felt supremely happy at the thought that he was sitting at his own table with his family around him. As for John, the Colonel's heart warmed as he looked at him.

"I shall be able to make a pal of him," he thought. "He's a fine lad.

"If only Trev were here, we should all be home together," he said aloud presently. "I know it can't be helped, but I would have given a good deal to have him with us."

"Oh, Trev's all right," laughed Peggy. "He's no end of a swell. I don't know how many hearts he's broken already."

The Colonel made no reply. He did not seem quite sure of his ground, and his eyes were passing quickly from face to face as if endeavouring to form judgment.

"If he can't get leave I shall go to see him at the first opportunity," was all he said, before going on to relate some of his experiences during the years he had been away.

The evening passed quickly away. The Colonel was blissfully happy at being at home again, while years had seemed to have rolled from his wife at the thought of having him by her side.

"Well, what do you think of them?" she asked, when at length they had retired to their room.

"John's splendid," he replied heartily, "just splendid."

"He is, isn't he? Of course the girls laugh at him, but there isn't a nicer boy living."

"Why should the girls laugh at him?"

"Oh, they say he's such a sobersides,—and—and—what do you think of the girls?"

"Eleanor seems very clever, but a bit reserved. I can't quite make her out yet."

"No, she isn't easy to understand. Of course she's very handsome, and very high spirited, and—has all sorts of ideas. She's got beyond me. In fact they both have."

"In what way? Tell me."

Mrs. Trelawney hesitated a moment, and seemed on the point of answering him, but decided to be silent.

Meanwhile the two girls found their way up-stairs, while John went into the room which in past years had been called the "Treadmill." It was the room which, when they had a governess, had been used as a school-room.

"Well?" queried Peggy when they were alone.

"I see trouble," replied Eleanor.

"Well, trouble or no trouble, I'm dying for a cig. It's the first evening I've spent without smoking for ages. Give me one."

"Haven't got any here. I left them down in the 'Treadmill.'"

"Then let's go down and get them. I can't sleep without a smoke."

"We'll have to be careful. As you can easily see, he's of the old-fashioned order, and may be shocked."

"Well, he must *be* shocked, that's all. I'm not one to hide my light under a bushel. Besides, everybody smokes now. I scarcely know a girl who doesn't have her packet of cigarettes a day. Still, as you say, we'll have to be careful. He'll not be played with. Like you, I see

trouble. But let's go down to the 'Treadmill,' and smoke there."

The girls went quietly down-stairs, and found their way into their old schoolroom.

"Hello, Johnny darling," exclaimed Peggy. "What are you doing here? It's time for children like you to be in bed."

"What are *you* doing here then?" retorted John.

"We've come for a smoke," replied Peggy. "We hadn't any baccy up-stairs, so we came here."

John looked at them steadily for a few seconds. "You are afraid of him then," he replied.

"Afraid! Not a bit. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Nothing if you play the game," was the boy's reply.

"Don't be silly," cried Peggy, lighting a cigarette, and throwing herself in an armchair.

There was a silence for a few seconds, then Eleanor broke out: "Well, Mother's darling, what do you think of him?"

"He's splendid," replied the boy. "He's just great. All the same, we are in for a new dispensation. A good thing too," he added, after a few seconds' silence.

"Bosh!" replied Peggy.

"It's not bosh," retorted John. "If Father had been home, these last two years, things would have been different, and you know it."

"Bosh!" repeated Peggy. "I'm just going on in the same way."

"No, you are not. As a proof of it, why didn't you smoke when he was with us?"

"Why, my dear boy, there's nothing in smoking."

"I don't say there is; but why didn't you?"

"Oh, well, we naturally wanted to see which way the wind blew. You see, he's at a dangerous age," she giggled, "and of course Eleanor and I wanted to sum him up first."

shut up in a nunnery, the sooner he knows the truth the better."

"Personally I can't imagine what you see in him," said Eleanor. "For that matter, I can't understand girls who are forever ogling men. Of course they are all right in their way. They take one to the theatre, or to supper, but as for the love business, and marrying, it's just sickening. I think any girl is a fool who gets married."

"Oh, you're cold-blooded."

"I try to be sensible, anyhow. Life isn't a very long business, and the idea of getting married and having babies, and that sort of thing is simply nauseous."

"I s'pose that's why you turn the cold shoulder to Rod Ravenscroft?"

"Rod Ravenscroft is all right as a friend, and if I wanted to marry I'd as soon have him as anybody. But as I've just said, love and marriage make no appeal to me. Still I don't want to judge any one else. We must all live our own lives."

"That's what I mean to do," cried Peggy. "And that's why I don't mean to let any one interfere between me and Jim."

"You'll find that Dad *will* interfere," interposed John.

"Then he'll be told to mind his own business, that's all."

"It is his business."

"How is it his business? If I'm fond of Jim, it's my own affair."

"But the fellow is such a bounder."

"Bounder yourself," retorted Peggy, with flashing eyes, "and a goody-goody bounder at that. Of course he's fond of life, but so am I, and I'm not going to stand any interference either from you, or any one else. I told Mother so last night."

John shrugged his shoulders. "Time'll tell," he remarked quietly.

"I suppose that means that *you'll* tell," retorted Peggy. "Well, tell, I don't care."

"Hark! What's that?" cried Eleanor.

At that moment there was the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside, and a low tapping at the window pane.

Peggy's face flushed crimson. "That'll be Jim," she whispered. "I told him not to come to-night, but—but——"

"But surely you are not going out to him?" said John as he saw his sister preparing to leave the room.

"Of course I am," was the girl's reply. "I'll be back in ten minutes."

CHAPTER III

PEG'S CARRYING ON

"LOOK here, Eleanor," said John when Peggy had gone, "Dad'll have to know about this."

"I suppose he will," was the reply, "but I don't see why he should."

"I say, that's cool."

"Cool if you like, but it's true."

"It isn't true. Don't you see, Peg's an ass. She's lost her head about this fellow Barnes, and it should be put a stop to."

"Why? Do you know anything wrong about him?"

"He isn't our sort for one thing, and for another, Peg's too young. She's only a kid, and it's not the thing for her to go out alone to meet him. I'm sure Dad won't have him coming to the house. He's common, he has no breeding—in short he's a bounder. As for a kid like Peg going out like that, it's a bit too thick."

"Oh, Peg knows how to take care of herself. She's a bit too developed on the physical side, but she's level headed, and knows her way around. She's years older than most girls her age. You'll see, she'll be back in ten minutes."

"If she isn't, I'll go out and kick the fellow off the premises."

"Johnny dear, you make me tired. You talk as though we lived a hundred years ago, when girls didn't know how to look after themselves, and when it was thought the duty of brothers to interfere with their sis-

ters' lives. Peg's an ass if you like, but she's all right. Besides, a girl has the right to live her own life."

"But she's making herself cheap. Just think of it. Colonel Trelawney's daughter, gone out on the sly to meet her young man, like any common girl."

"Nothing very sly about it," laughed Eleanor. "No, Peg's not that sort. What she does, she does in the open. Not that I agree with her, and I shall tell her so. Any girl's a fool to get fond of a fellow, and a bigger fool still to let him see it. Still, she seems to be cast in that mould, and never seems happy unless she's with him."

"I tell you, Dad won't have it. He's not that sort. I saw that the moment I looked at him. Both of you have twisted Mother around your fingers; but there'll be a change now. Dad may be quiet; but he'll be obeyed."

"He'll find that Hampstead is not a barracks, and that this is a free country," replied Eleanor.

"I say, Eleanor, don't you like him? Don't you think he's just splendid?"

"Oh, yes, I like him all right. I should think he's a bit antiquated, and will need to learn a few things, but I fancy I shall be proud of him. I do hope he'll be reasonable, though."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Look here, Johnny, I think it is best for us to have a clear understanding about things. You seem to think that because a man's your father he has the right to tell you what you shall do, and what you shan't do."

"Isn't that your idea?"

"It may be all right with kids, but not at our age."

"Peg's only a kid."

"To all intents and purposes Peg is over twenty. She's what you may call an early development, and she knows her own mind. It's no use closing our eyes to the fact that the girls of to-day are not going to be treated as our grandmothers were. On the other hand, Dad has

been away for several years,—out of the world in fact. He knows nothing of the changes that have taken place. He was always a bit old-fashioned, and I don't imagine he's altered much. Of course he's very nice, and I think I shall be fond of him, but if he thinks we can be treated like one of Jane Austen's heroines, he'll have a rude awakening."

"You seem to be taking a lot for granted, Eleanor," replied John. "You are talking as though he'd already begun to play the Spartan. He hasn't said a word, and I'm sure he's the grandest man alive."

"Oh, you are hero worshipping. You've got all sorts of high falutin' thoughts about him, and look upon him as a little tin god. I've been watching him all the evening, and I've fairly well summed him up."

"Well, and what are your conclusions?"

"I think there'll be trouble."

"But why?"

"Because he's a type of the old-fashioned gentleman of the past ages. He'll expect us to be amenable to authority, and to give an account of our doings. And we've got beyond that. Mother's always been telling us about her young days, and what Dad would say and do when he came home, and that's made Peg and me talk about it. Are you going to support us, or are you going to play the sneak?"

"Look here, Eleanor, Dad ought to know how Peg's been carrying on."

"She's been doing no wrong."

"I don't say she has; but Dad must know about this Barnes affair. Besides, I tell you straight, he won't stand these promiscuous dances, and this going out to supper after theatres with fellows that he doesn't know."

"He'll have to stand it."

"What do you mean, Eleanor?"

"Just that. However, we'll hope for the best. If he'll

be reasonable perhaps we'll be able to rub along. Anyhow, we'll give him a trial."

Meanwhile Peggy had rushed into the garden, and looked eagerly around.

"Jim," she whispered, "is that you?"

"Yes, Peg. I've come in spite of orders," he said, as he took the girl in his arms and kissed her ardently.

"But you must clear out in double-quick time, dear, I shouldn't have come out only I was afraid somebody might hear you."

"He's come then?"

"Of course he's come."

"What's he like?"

"Oh, a great swell, I suppose. Just the aristocratic 'pukka' officer. But he's not a bit like Mother."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, I can do what I like with her. I can frighten her into almost anything. But he's not like her. He doesn't say much; but there's a look in his eye that makes one hesitate. Once or twice to-night he almost made me afraid."

"I say, Peg."

"He did. Of course I would not own it to the 'pattern boy,' or even to Eleanor. But I fancy there'll be trouble."

"Never mind, Peg darling, you'll have me to stand by you."

Peg was silent.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"I've nothing to tell; but I don't think you'd better come for a day or two till I see how things are going. You see he's only just come home, and I don't quite know how things are going."

"But tell me what he's like."

"Oh, he's just the aristocratic officer of the old sort. He hasn't said much yet, but I can see he has silly, old-

fashioned ideas, especially about girls. He believes in being very polite and courteous to them in the old-fashioned way, but I believe he'd go into fits if he thought I was out here with you now. He's just that sort. He made me think of Rip Van Winkle to-night. All the same, I can see that there'll be trouble before we're through."

The young fellow was silent for a few seconds. "Perhaps we'd better go slowly for a few days," he said at length, "but there, he may not be as bad as you think."

"Oh, John's made a hero of him already; but *he's* always been the perfect pattern. I believe he'll tell Dad that I've been out here with you now."

"Does he know?"

"Yes, he was in the 'Treadmill' with Eleanor and me when you came, and he says Dad ought to know."

"But you'll stand by me, old girl, won't you? You won't let any one come between us?"

"I'm not going to be dictated to by any one. That'll have to be understood right away."

"What about the dance on Saturday?" He spoke rather doubtfully.

"Oh, we shall both come to that. I wouldn't miss it for anything."

"Will you tell him?"

"I shall see about that. Anyhow I shall come. If needs be, I shall take French leave. But I must go in now."

"Well, be careful, Peg. Give me another kiss, kid, and play your game carefully."

While Peggy Trelawney found her way back to the house, James Barnes wended his way to his home. He was rather a handsome young fellow of the flashy sort. He had been in the army during the war, and by some means or another had obtained a commission. He was very proud of this fact, and had often read the wording

of the Commission with great satisfaction. Belonging to a rather humble station in life, he prided himself on the fact that an officer in the army was considered a gentleman, and he was very punctilious about his men saluting him, and calling him "sir." It was true he had been greatly chagrined that several officers treated him with scant courtesy, and that he was never admitted into certain circles which it was his ambition to enter, but he assured his people when he was home on leave that he was as good as the best of them, and spoke quite patronizingly of his colonel as "a bit old-fashioned, but quite a good soldier, dontcher know."

Before entering the army he had been a clerk in an auctioneer's and real estate agent's office, and on being demobilized had been taken back on his old job. Being a pushing fellow, and eager to get on, his employers had sometimes entrusted him to deal with some of their less important clients. This had led him to describe himself as "the representative of Messrs. Feather and Byworth, real estate agents."

Nevertheless he felt his demobilization keenly. He was no longer "an officer and a gentleman," although he tried to assure himself that he was the latter.

"Hang it all," he often said to himself. "I'm more than an ordinary clerk, and to be a real estate agent is to have a gentleman's job."

Still, he felt sure he was getting on. He had taken dancing lessons during the war-time and became quite an adept in this art. Indeed on one occasion he got an invitation to a dance which was given at a house of some importance.

It was at this house he met Eleanor and Peggy Trelawney, and unfortunately caught Peggy's fancy. After that they met frequently, and Peggy had insisted that he should be admitted into the house as a friend.

Barnes was *greatly delighted* at his conquest, and fre-

quently spoke of his acquaintance with the Trelawney family.

"Colonel Trelawney belongs to one of the oldest families in England," he boasted, "and will soon be a General. I'm well in with them all. As for the girl, she is fairly gone on me."

Still he was not quite happy about the matter. He had sense enough to feel his lack of breeding, and to realize that not only John, but John's friends did not regard him favourably. Especially was he perturbed when he heard that Colonel Trelawney was coming home.

For he counted a great deal on his intimacy with Peggy. He had great ambitions to be what he called "a gentleman," and he felt sure that if he could marry into the Trelawney family, his future would be assured.

When he reached his home, which was in a section of Camden Town, he found that his two sisters, who worked in a large drapery establishment in Oxford Street, had just returned from the theatre and were accompanied by two young fellows, whom they called their "best boys."

"Hello, Jim," cried one, "where have you been?"

"Oh, just paying a visit to a friend."

"Been taking out that little bit of fluff that you are so fond of?"

"I say, Riddler, I'll trouble you not to talk like that."

"Oh, all right," retorted Riddler good-humouredly, "but I don't see why you should make so much fuss about it."

"The Trelawneys are not quite your sort," said Jim loftily.

"She'll have to be if *you* marry her," was the reply. "But there, I hear her father is coming home, so most likely he'll put the kybosh on your little plans."

"I don't see why we are not as good as they are after all," broke in Edith Barnes, Jim's eldest sister. "They

can't be very wealthy, for while one of the sons is in the army, the other is just a mechanic at a motor place in Oxford Street. There's not much to choose between being a motor mechanic and a clerk to a house agent. Of course I know he was at Rugby and all that, but I consider myself quite as good as Peggy Trelawney, or Eleanor either, for that matter."

"Where's Mother?" asked Jim as if anxious to change the subject.

"In bed hours since, where all good mothers ought to be," laughed Jim's other sister. "But it's getting late, and you boys had better be off. I'll see my little Dicky to the door."

"I suppose you'll be at the dance on Saturday, Jim," remarked Riddler. "It'll be the best of the season."

"Yes."

"Going to take your best girl?"

"I don't know what business it is of yours."

"I'll bet you anything you don't."

"Why?"

"Because her father'll be home, and he'll put a stop to your little capers."

"We shall see," replied Jim with seeming confidence. Nevertheless he went to bed with many doubts in his mind. He recalled what Peggy had said about her father, and although he had made light of Riddler's remarks concerning the change the Colonel's home-coming would cause, he had many misgivings.

"Of course I would rather do the thing in a grand way," he reflected next morning. "It would do me no end of good if I could be married at the church, with Peg's father giving the bride away, but I'm not going to stand any nonsense, neither will Peg."

CHAPTER IV

THE DISILLUSIONMENT

DURING the next few days, Colonel Trelaw was occupied with affairs at the War Office elsewhere. He had many people to see, and ports to make to people in high places. As a conseque he was away from home all the day, and did not ret home till dinner-time. Even on the Saturday, when had hoped to take his family to some place of amu ment, he had been detained at Whitehall, discussing qu tions of policy in relation to the Eastern races with wh he had been for years associated. He was greatly appointed at this, for he had eagerly looked forward t delightful evening at the Opera.

At five o'clock he was on the point of ringing up wife, in order to ask her to bring the children to to so that they might all go together. But as fortune, misfortune, would have it, a message came from an friend asking him whether he might call at his ho that night at nine o'clock, as he wished to see him o matter of importance.

"Never mind," thought the Colonel, "I shall be fr next week, and then we'll make up for lost time."

It was nearly eight o'clock when he reached home, feeling rather depressed. Somehow his home-com had not brought him the happiness he had hoped. I true his wife was just the same loving little soul he always known her to be, but he could not understand children. Especially was this true of the girls. In s of all he could say or do, a barrier existed between th and while he had, as yet, said nothing to them about he was anything but pleased at their evident manner thinking, or of their modes of speech. Moreover, t

had not seemed at ease in his presence. Immediately after dinner they had gone away by themselves, as though they wanted to be alone.

"I might be an ogre," he said to himself. "They seem to be utterly uneasy, and unnatural when they are with me, as though they were afraid I should find out something about them. Of course John's a fine boy, and I can see our becoming great friends, but even he doesn't speak as freely to me as I would like to have him. However, after Graythorpe has gone to-night, we'll have a clear understanding about everything."

When he entered the dining-room, however, he found only his wife there.

"Where are the children, Alice?" he asked.

"John had to go to the Davenports. Mr. Davenport wanted to see him about something at the works. He said he would be back about ten."

"And the girls, where are they?"

"They are gone out," his wife replied.

"Evidently; but where?"

Mrs. Trelawney looked uncomfortable. "I don't know," was her hesitating reply.

"Don't know? That's rather strange, isn't it? What time will they be home?"

"Lester, I really don't know."

He was about to question her further, but at that moment a servant came into the room, and further conversation of this sort was impossible. When they were alone again, however, the Colonel, who had been silent throughout dinner, spoke.

"Alice," he said, "you are keeping something from me; what is it? Is there something wrong with the girls?"

"No-o—I really don't know. Nothing more than usual."

"You say you *don't know* where they are?"

"No, I don't. I believe they are gone to a dance, but they would not tell me where."

"Would not tell you where? I don't understand."

Mrs. Trelawney burst out sobbing. "Oh, my dear," she said, "I'm very unhappy. I've wanted to tell you ever since you came home, but somehow I couldn't. Things are so different from what they were when I was a girl. The war has changed everything."

Colonel Trelawney looked at his wife steadily for a few seconds. He understood her perfectly. He realized that, in spite of all her splendid qualities, she was utterly lacking in strength, and in the power to command. He had not been slow to see that the girls paid her little attention, but his mind had been so filled with other things that he had not been able to give much attention to home affairs.

"Oh, my husband," she went on, "I'm so glad, so thankful that you are home, *so* thankful. You see they are beyond me. When I try to be firm, they threaten me."

"Threaten you? I don't understand."

"Threaten that they'll leave home—threaten all sorts of things."

"But tell me, little wife. This is serious."

"Oh, Lester, I've tried to do my best, but what could I do? Take Eleanor, for example. She was always a reserved, independent kind of girl, and resented any sort of correction, and during the war everything came to a head. She got work in a Government office where she had very good pay. Everybody did it, and of course I couldn't refuse. It—it was patriotic. She is very clever, too, and learned stenography and typewriting and all that sort of thing. Well, she got friendly with all sorts of people. She brought home some of them, nearly all girls of a class of whom I knew nothing. Fast, *liquor-drinking* women they were, who held all sorts of

strange notions. They swore, and discussed things which to me were—were—shocking. But Eleanor only laughed when I protested, and told me that if she couldn't bring them home, she should join one of their clubs in town. So—so you see how I was placed, don't you? As for Peggy, she went to a munition factory, and—and, oh, my dear—I don't know, but she seems to like the company of people that I would never think of associating with."

The Colonel listened quietly, but made no remarks for several seconds. Perhaps he was not so much surprised as his wife thought he would be.

"You say Eleanor discussed things which you thought shocking," he said at length; "what things?"

"Oh, free love, and that sort of thing. One of them actually declared to me, that while she hated the thought of marriage as an utterly unnatural and degrading thing, she claimed the right to have children in order to be true to the maternal instinct that nature had implanted in every woman."

"And of course Eleanor listened to this stuff. Did she seem to agree?"

"I don't know. I suppose she did, for when I told her I would not have that kind of woman in the house, she told me about some sort of club of which they were members, and which she proposed to join."

Again the Colonel reflected a few seconds before speaking.

"And Peggy," he said at length, "surely that child did not listen to this stuff?"

"Oh, yes, she did. And in a way she is the more difficult of the two to deal with. She's passionate and wilful, and—and I don't like talking about it, but she never seems happy unless she's with men. And she's picked up with some fellow named Barnes whom I utterly disapprove of."

"Picked up with some fellow! Peggy! That child!"

"Oh, I knew you would be angry. But they were too much for me. Besides, they threatened to leave home, and I thought it better for her to bring him here than for her to go with him to places that I knew nothing of."

"And they have gone off to-night—gone to some place of which you know nothing?"

"Oh, don't mistake me. Up to now, I don't believe they've come to any real harm. In fact I'm sure they haven't. But they are beyond *me*."

"And you've no idea where they've gone to-night?"

"No; but I'm sure it's to a dance of some sort!"

"A dance? You mean at some friend's house?"

"No, I don't. It's a subscription dance."

"But who's responsible for it? Is it on behalf of some charity?"

"I don't know."

"Then they have no chaperon?"

"No, they laugh at the idea of such a thing. At first, I protested at the idea of their going without me, but they wouldn't hear of my going with them."

"And what time have they been getting home?"

"Very late. Two and three in the morning. Of course I waited up for them, but they insisted that I shouldn't continue to do so. They told me that if I did, they would go to the houses of some of their friends."

"And you? What did you do then?"

"Oh, my dear, don't be angry with me. I didn't know what to do, and when they insisted on having latch-keys I thought it best to let them have them. What could I do? I was here all alone, and I didn't like to tell any one about my trouble. How could I? I tried to comfort myself with the thought that you would come home. But oh, it was terrible! When those awful reports came home about your being missing and—and—oh, my darling, thank God you are here! I've kept it from you as

long as I could, but I felt I must tell you, no matter what the children might say or do."

"Why, did they tell you that I must know nothing?"

"I think Peggy's afraid of you, although she says she isn't. She threatened me that if I told you about that fellow Barnes until she said I might, she'd run away and marry him."

Still the Colonel kept control over himself.

"What kind of fellow is he?" he asked at length.

"Oh, he's rather good-looking, after a fashion. Tall and big, and that kind of thing, but utterly common. He was in the army, and had a commission, but from what I can learn he is now a clerk, or something of that sort."

"And is she supposed to be engaged to him?"

"Yes,—no,—I don't know. You see, at first, I protested against Peggy having anything to say to him; then when she threatened all sorts of wild things, I thought it best to wait until you came home. Oh, if you had only been able to come home six months ago, as you thought you would at first, it might have been stopped. And yet I don't know, everything and everybody is upset. John did his best, and as I told you, he's been *such* a comfort to me, but of course he's not like you. Still, I don't know what I should have done without him. He doesn't say much, but I know he's had a restraining influence, especially upon Peggy."

"Let me understand," said the Colonel after a few minutes' silence. "From what I can gather, they have refused to allow you to control them at all, and they've pretty much gone their own way. Eleanor has got mixed up with a lot of free-thinking women, from whom she has imbibed all sorts of ideas, and has insisted on entire freedom from you."

"Yes, I'm afraid she has."

"As for Peggy, it seems that she's a little bit common."

"I don't like to *think so, and* yet I'm afraid she is,

"Yes, sir—that's it. I——"

"Yes, John, what is it?" said the Colonel when John hesitated.

"Well, sir—Dad—it isn't because I don't want, that I don't tell you where the girls are gone—only I—I want to play the game."

"I quite see your point," replied the Colonel. "Just as, when you were at school, you wouldn't tell a master that a boy was breaking the rules."

"Yes, that's it," said John eagerly.

"But you'd want to be fair to the school, too," went on the Colonel. "You'd want the boy to own up, and do the straight thing?"

"Yes, and that's why I made them promise to——" he broke off suddenly. He felt he was perhaps saying too much.

The Colonel did not pursue the conversation further. He was an understanding man, and was all the better pleased with his son for his reticence.

"Let's have another game, my boy," he said genially, "and by that time it'll be bedtime."

When John had gone to bed, the Colonel had a few minutes' conversation with his wife, after which he again retired to his den, where he seemed in deep thought.

"I don't think there's very much wrong yet," he reflected, "but I fancy I've a difficult job on hand. Poor little Alice, I'm sorry for her."

He sat for a long time thinking, occasionally looking at his watch. He had carefully drawn the curtains, and as the one light was shaded, the room, from the outside, appeared to be in darkness.

Twelve o'clock struck, then one, then two, and still the girls did not come. More than once the Colonel appeared impatient, and almost angry, and then a look of affectionate yearning came into his eyes.

"Yes," he murmured more than once, "I must get to the bottom of this. It's bad, bad, very bad."

When the hands of the clock were nearing three, he heard footsteps outside, followed by the sound of voices. Also there was laughter.

"Mayn't we come in?" This was in a man's voice.

"No, not for worlds."

Still more whispering, and then more laughter.

Presently the Colonel heard the sound of a latch-key inserted in the door, followed by more whispering voices.

"Evidently our long-lost father is in bed," he heard Peggy say.

"It would seem so. The mater has evidently told him nothing."

"But he must know we've been out all night, and I'm looking forward to a —— of a row."

"It may be that he's decided to be sensible, and not take any notice of it."

He heard this as they passed the door of the room. Evidently it was not their purpose to go straight to bed, for they went through the hall as if with the intention of finding their way into "The Treadmill." For a few seconds he stood still as if thinking what was the best thing to do.

Colonel Trelawney was greatly perturbed. He was more than perturbed. He was distressed and angry. In spite of what his wife had told him, he could not help being shocked at what he had heard Peggy say. He was a man of the world, and quite accustomed to lurid language in the army. But he had idealized women, and never dreamt that his girls would use terms such as Peggy had used.

After waiting a few seconds he found his way to "The Treadmill," and quietly entered.

CHAPTER V

THE STORM BREAKS

BOTH girls started as they saw him. Each of them sat in an armchair, their legs crossed, smoking.

Eleanor was the more restrained of the two. Although the entrance of her father was unexpected, and startling, she kept her seat and went on smoking. Peggy, however, started to her feet, her eyes flashing, and her lips quivering, as though she were preparing herself for a storm.

"Excuse me for intruding," said the Colonel quietly, "but I thought I would just let you know that I am not asleep."

Both of them were speechless. There was something in the quiet tones of his voice, something, too, in his very presence that made them afraid.

"I did not get home till eight o'clock," he went on, "and was naturally surprised not to find you here. I was still more surprised to know that your mother did not know where you were gone."

"She did not know, because we didn't think it best to tell her," replied Peggy, evidently ready for battle.

"I see," remarked the Colonel quietly. "May I ask why?"

"Because we thought she might tell you."

"Was there any objection to that?"

"There might be," was Peggy's curt reply.

"I see. You thought I might forbid your going."

There was a touch of anger in his voice which he could

not repress. Peggy was quick to note this, and it gave her the courage to say what she and Eleanor had spoken about many times.

"It would have made no difference if you had."

"Indeed, is that so?" he replied quietly. "Anyhow, it gives one an idea how we stand."

He was on the point of saying more, when he looked at the child's angry, defiant eyes. In spite of everything she was a pretty, attractive girl. It was true she was rather over developed for one of her years, but still only a child to him. Almost unconsciously his mind fled back over the years, and he thought of her as she was when he had left England. His memory called up a laughing eyed, untidily dressed, wilful, but loving little maid, who found it difficult to enunciate her r's. He remembered her as generous-hearted, too, difficult to deal with, certainly, but a tender-hearted little thing all the same.

He crushed back the words he was going to utter. He felt they would do no good, and would probably do harm. Perhaps neither of them had had a fair chance. He had been away several years, and they looked upon him as a stranger. He had been out of the world during those years, away from all the influences which had changed the thought and life of the country. He must make allowances; he must try to understand. On the other hand, however, Colonel Trelawney was a soldier and a disciplinarian. He had a pride of birth, too, and shrunk from everything that was out of accord with the traditions of his name. All the Trelawney women were far removed from the loud, vulgar type of creature whom at heart he despised, and he could not stand supinely by, while they besmirched his name.

"Children," he said quietly, "you and I will have to understand one another. Naturally, on coming back after so many years, I find things changed. But we Trelawneys have always been very proud of our women.

We have idealized them somewhat. However, I need not speak about that now. I was much surprised to learn that this is not the first time you have gone out alone, and have returned in the early hours of the morning without getting your mother's consent. Also, you've been out without a proper chaperon. But we'll not discuss it to-night. I'm too distressed to speak as calmly as I ought, while you are not in the frame of mind to receive, what I shall have to say, in the right spirit. All the same we shall have to come to an understanding, for I can assure you that this kind of thing must come to an end. To-morrow we will discuss everything fully. Meanwhile, it is best that you should know that I am trying to look at things from your point of view, and that although your old dad has been away so long, he loves you both very dearly. Good-night, or rather, good-morning. You'll want to go to bed."

He held the door open, and waited for them to pass through. He did not offer to kiss them; he did not think it best. He saw the hot, rebellious flash in Peggy's eyes, and noted the supercilious and slightly bored attitude which Eleanor had assumed.

When they had gone, the Colonel went back to his den, and sat for a long time in deep thought. He had never dreamt of such a position, and did not know what to do.

"Did you speak to them?" asked his wife when at length he went to his room.

He shook his head. "Nothing of importance," he replied. "I did not think it wise. I only told them we would have to come to an understanding later."

Meanwhile Eleanor and Peggy had gone to their rooms.

"You see we're in for it," said Peggy.

"Yes. Of course, I saw it would come. I summed him up the night he came home."

"I must confess, though, that he kept very calm. I was downright frightened when he came into the room. I thought there'd be —— to pay."

"I expect there will before long."

"I don't know. I thought he took it very well."

"That's because you don't understand him. For my own part, I should have been easier in my mind if he had blustered, and threatened. But he's not that sort. He's one of those quiet, iron-willed men who are always hardest to deal with. All your pranks are over, my child."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll be as gentle as a cooing dove after he's been home a few weeks."

"Will I?" cried the child defiantly. "You'll see if he tries to come the stern parent over me. I tell you, I'll run away; I'll marry Jim."

"And make a fool of yourself."

"I don't care if I do."

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders. "Of course you'll do as you like; but I can see we're in for a storm."

The next morning the Colonel knocked at Eleanor's door. "It's ten o'clock," he said pleasantly; "you'll be late for church if you aren't quick."

The girl did not speak.

"Did you hear me?" said the Colonel in a louder voice.

"Yes, I heard you."

"That's right. You'll be down in a few minutes, then?"

"No, I'm tired. I don't propose getting up yet."

"I say, I *am* disappointed," said the Colonel. "I had looked forward to your going to church with me on my first Sunday home."

"No, thank you," replied Eleanor, "I don't propose going."

The Colonel hesitated, and seemed on the point of say-

ing something more, but evidently decided to be silent. Then he made a movement as if to go to Peggy's room, but again stopped. There was a dangerous flash in his eyes as he went down-stairs, but he said nothing to his wife.

"Going to church, John?" he asked as the clock neared eleven.

"If you wish, Dad," replied the boy.

When the Colonel and John returned an hour and a half later the former was very quiet. The whole family gathered in the dining-room for lunch, and the Colonel talked pleasantly on commonplace topics. It might seem as though he had forgotten the previous night's conversation. The two girls, however, were watchful, and excited. They felt that the atmosphere was tense, while Mrs. Trelawney looked nervously from face to face as if constantly expecting an outbreak.

When lunch came to an end the girls were preparing to leave the room but were suddenly arrested by their father's voice.

"Will you all come into 'The Treadmill,'" he said quietly. "I want a little talk with you."

"I hope it won't take long," remarked Peggy; "I have an engagement at three o'clock."

"I'm not quite sure how long our conversation will take," replied the Colonel. "It may be best for you to contemplate breaking your engagement, whatever it may be."

Although Peggy sadly wanted to say something in defiance, there was a ring in her father's voice which restrained her. She instantly felt a force to which she was unaccustomed. She no longer had her mother to deal with, but a personality of a different order.

The Colonel did not speak for a few seconds after following them into the room. He quietly lit his pipe, and after lighting it sat back in his armchair.

"Girls," he said, "have you given up going to church?"

There was no reply.

He repeated the question.

"Yes," replied Eleanor, "at least, I have. Are you looking for your cigarettes, Peg? Have one of mine," and she threw her a case.

"Are *they* the cause of it?" asked the Colonel, motioning to the cigarettes. "You never saw your mother use those things."

"Because I have no use for religion," replied Eleanor, coolly ignoring his reference to their smoking.

"Ah, is that so? Then, may I ask why?"

"Really, Father, I didn't expect to be asked to pass a theological examination. I have no use for religion because I can't see what use it is to me. I believe there are a few people, even yet, who find use for it. But that is their affair."

"But *you* have none?"

"None. That is as religion is ordinarily understood."

"I don't quite follow you."

"I'm sorry. The religion I was brought up to believe in doesn't appeal to me. It doesn't seem to hold water. I can't see the good of going to church. One is simply bored. Of course, I imagine most people have a religion of some sort; but again, that is their own affair. It's purely a personal matter."

"May I ask whether you've given up the ethics of the Christian religion?" asked the Colonel.

"Really, Father, I've never considered the matter. The world's ideas have grown during the last two thousand years, and I imagine if one needs a religion one will have to think the matter out on his own lines."

"That's very interesting. Then from what you say, I suppose you do not regard the Christian religion as having any authority over *you*?"

"I don't see why it should have."

"Eleanor, my dear, for shame! How can you say such things?" cried Mrs. Trelawney helplessly.

Although the girl was very pale, and her lips trembled somewhat, she retained remarkable control over herself. She extracted a cigarette from the case which Peggy had handed back to her, and lit it with fairly steady fingers.

"Why for shame, Mother?" she asked. "I suppose Father doesn't want me to tell him any lies. He has asked me questions, and I have tried to answer him to the best of my ability."

"Then the Commandments are, according to your point of view, obsolete, I suppose?" asked the Colonel, taking no notice of his wife's interruption.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no. What particular commandment do you refer to?"

"'Honour thy father and thy mother,'" was the Colonel's reply. "Don't you believe in that?"

"Not in the sense in which you regard it. It may be that one's father and mother do not deserve honouring."

"There is another Biblical precept," went on the Colonel. "'Children, obey your parents.' Don't you believe in that?"

"Not necessarily. It may be all right for kiddies; but when one has grown up, one must use one's own judgment."

"I see," and the Colonel's voice became hard as he spoke: "then we'll leave the abstract aspect of the question, and come to the personal. Do you regard it as your duty to obey me?"

Eleanor thought a few seconds before replying. Up to now, she felt that she was going through her catechism very well. She saw, too, by the triumphant flash in Peggy's eyes that her sister thought she had carried her points triumphantly. But now she felt on less sure *ground.* Try as she might against it there was some-

thing in her father's presence that awed her. Not so much because he was a strong, clear-headed man, but because he was her father. Had another man made any assumption of authority she would have strongly resented it, but she felt that for some inexplicable reason, her father was different. Still she would stand by her guns. As she had told her sister more than once, she felt that the tug-of-war was coming, and she thought she was ready for it.

"Not if your commands opposed my judgment, and hindered my freedom," was her answer.

"I see," replied the Colonel, "and I presume Peggy also has the same views."

"Yes, only a bit stronger," replied Peggy, and the tones of her voice bordered on the insolent.

The Colonel gave a quick glance around the room, and saw his wife's anxious, almost horror-stricken look, noted, too, the eager interest in John's face. He felt that an important hour had come in the history of his family.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIGHT TO "LIVE THEIR LIVES"

"I NEED scarcely say,"—the Colonel spoke very quietly,—"that this kind of thing has come upon me as a kind of shock. I have been away for several years, and have been ignorant of what has been going on. More than once I doubted if ever I should come home;—but let that pass. I *have* come home, and find things different from what I expected. I looked forward to finding my girls, loving, devoted children who would delight in taking me into their confidence. I thought we should be great friends, and a happy family. Instead, I find a mutinous spirit. I find that things have been going on which I utterly disapprove of. At first I thought it was a kind of youthful revolt, which could easily be quieted. I never dreamed that children of mine would studiously and deliberately act in a way which meant setting at naught the desires and wishes of their parents. But there it is. I find the loving friendships I had looked forward to made impossible."

"Not if you mean to be reasonable. Please remember that we are no longer babies in arms, without wills of our own. Neither are we anything like Jane Austen's heroines."

Peggy spoke defiantly, like one who was ready for battle. She was not only passionate and self-willed by nature, but, like most children of her age, she resented being regarded as a child. By some strange freak of nature, girls of nineteen want to add to their age. When they reach thirty, it is all the other way. She and Elea-

nor had talked many times about what they meant to do if their father tried to curtail their liberty, and now they, as well as he, felt that the hour had come when they must assert their rights.

"Of course I have not called you in here without reason," went on the Colonel. "No one can tell the pain it gives me to do so; but as I said last night, we must come to an understanding. Frankly I cannot, and *will* not, have a repetition of last night's experience."

"You mean that you want to shut us up like nuns in a nunnery?"

"No, I don't mean anything of the sort. I remember that you are young, and that it is your right to enjoy yourself. I came home with the determination to give you all the enjoyment it was in my power to give. I wanted you to meet with young people of your own age. Of course I expected you to be good, God-fearing Christian girls, and I hoped you would feel you had your duties in life; but I wanted you to take part in all good healthy pleasures."

Eleanor was silent, but Peggy forced a laugh. "Really, Father, you remind one of Rip Van Winkle," she said.

The Colonel felt his anger rising, but he suppressed it.

"Possibly that may be the case," he replied. "Still I am trying to look at the situation fairly. I came home after several years' absence and find my two daughters defying their mother's authority. I find them refusing to tell her where they are going——"

"Why should we tell her?" snapped Peggy.

"I find, too, as was exemplified last night, that they go to indiscriminate dances without a chaperon, and return between two and three in the morning, accompanied by men of whom I know nothing."

"Well, we *are no longer children*," asserted Peggy.

"I will say nothing of the good taste of this," went on the Colonel, "to put it on no higher platform. Neither will I, for the moment, discuss the effect it is likely to have on your future; but one would have thought that you would have had some thought for the feelings of your father and mother. I hoped that you would remember that your mother has suffered much, and sacrificed much for your sakes, and that you would have respected her wishes."

"The argument doesn't seem to carry conviction," interposed Eleanor.

"It isn't a matter of argument," replied the Colonel. "It is a matter of decent feeling."

"I am afraid I don't see it. We weren't consulted whether we would be born or not. It wasn't for our pleasure that we were brought into the world."

"Then, as I understand it, you utterly refuse to recognize your mother's authority, or mine?"

"Really, Father, I don't want to shock your feelings; but honestly I do not see why it is my duty to obey my parents. I do not see by what right they expect obedience from me. I did not ask to be born. I am here in the world without my own consent, and seeing I am here, I do not see why I should not live my own life in my own way."

"Then I'll put it this way," replied the Colonel. "Do you think your parents have any duty towards you?"

"Yes, I think they have. Seeing they have brought me into the world it is their duty to do their best for me: but, for the life of me, I can't see what duty I owe to them."

"Just so," replied the Colonel, "and it is because I feel I have a duty towards you that I am not going to allow you to go on in the way you have been going."

"I suppose that means that you are going to restrict *our liberty?*"

"If you put it in that way, yes."

"You mean to dictate to us, to tell us what time we may go out, and what time we may come in?"

"Don't try to misinterpret my words. In all the established, natural, healthy things of life, I should not think, within ordinary limitations, of interfering with you; but I have my duties as a parent, whether or not you have yours as children. One of those duties is to see that my children do not ruin their lives. For that reason I will not have them making undesirable acquaintances, or going to amusements of which I don't approve. And please, children, remember that I am not thinking only of myself in this, I am thinking of you. Please remember, too, that I love you."

"Wouldn't it be well to drop the sentimental side of the question?" replied Eleanor coolly. "We have to take things as they are. Now, Father, listen to reason. You have been away a good many years, during which time the thoughts of the world have changed and we have ceased to be children. We have learnt to think for ourselves, to live our own lives, and choose our own companions. You come back to us, a stranger, and you expect us to get sentimental about you, and to allow you to dictate our way of life. Is that the position?"

"And if it is?"

"Well, then, I tell you plainly, I don't propose to submit."

"May I ask what you propose to do?"

"I propose to go my own way. To live my own life."

"So do I," interposed Peggy defiantly.

The Colonel was silent for a few seconds. The case was more difficult than he imagined. He found it easy to command a number of soldiers who were amenable to discipline; but he was for a moment at a loss how to treat his own children.

"Oh, *my dear children,*" pleaded Mrs. Trelawney,

"don't you see how foolish you are? Don't you realize that your father is older and wiser than you?"

"It comes to this," said the Colonel. "I find open rebellion in my house. I find that you, my children, declare war against me. I am more grieved than I can say: but I am not a martinet. I want to do what is right. But I must have obedience."

"What is that but being a martinet? You want to treat us as though we had no life or convictions of our own?"

"No," replied the Colonel, "I don't; but I must be master in my own house. And I will not have my children going to places of which I don't approve, I will not have my daughters going out to parties without a proper chaperon, I will not have them coming home at any time they choose, and I will not have them picking up with common fellows, as though they had no self-respect."

"I suppose Mother's been telling you lies about Jim," cried Peggy passionately. "That's mean, and underhanded. Jim's as good as we are."

"I've said no word about any one," interposed the Colonel.

"But I can see what you mean, and I'm not going to be dictated to, and if I like to go out with Jim I shall."

The Colonel still kept his temper.

"Do I understand that you are engaged to Jim?—whoever he may be," asked the Colonel, and there was a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"And if I am?—what then?"

"Well, for one thing, you are not of age, and therefore I shall have something to do with it, and for another, it is my duty to my child to see that any man she may care for is worthy of her. And now I think enough has been said for the present."

"*Of course* you've done what we expected," replied

Eleanor. "You have taken your own line of action, and you leave us no alternative but to take ours."

"Very well, if you will have it so, it must be so. I have tried to keep from saying anything harsh, and I'm deeply grieved that you've met me in this spirit."

Although she did not realize it, Mrs. Trelawney had made her husband's work difficult. Almost on every occasion when the girls had been headstrong and rebellious, she had threatened them with what their father would do when he came home. She had painted him as a relentless disciplinarian, one who would put down disobedience with a strong hand. Their antagonism had been aroused before the Colonel arrived, and Eleanor and Peggy had often discussed the question as to what they would do if their father sought to interfere with them.

In spite of themselves, however, the Colonel's homecoming had influenced them. Instead of being a kind of ogre, they found him kind and loving. It was true he was old-fashioned in his views, but he was anything but the overbearing, military autocrat which they had conjured up. There was a quiet strength, too, in his every word and movement which they could not understand, but which they could not help feeling. Still, and this was especially true of Eleanor, they determined not to yield an inch from the position they had taken up.

"May I ask,"—Eleanor spoke frigidly—"whether I have to obtain your consent before going out for a walk this afternoon? I think I should like a little exercise."

"Yes, and I should like to know whether you object to our bringing in our friends?" Peggy burst out before the Colonel had a chance of replying to Eleanor.

"Certainly you may bring in your friends," replied the Colonel. "I always brought home my friends, as a boy, and my father always encouraged me to do so."

"Does that mean *that I* can bring Jim home?"

The Colonel hesitated a few seconds. "Yes," he replied. "I shall be glad if you will. I think it will be well for me to see him."

John gave his father a quick glance. "I say, Dad!" he cried protestingly.

"Yes, my boy, what is it?"

"You told me I might have George Davenport in to supper to-night."

"Certainly I did. What then?"

"Only that—that——" John stammered painfully.

"Yes, what is it?" persisted the Colonel.

"Nothing," replied John; "perhaps I'll get George to come another time."

"But why another time? To-night is quite convenient, and I want you to have your friend in. I want to meet him. You were pals at Rugby, and I want you to keep up your school friendships."

"All right, sir," replied John, but it was easy to see that he was angry.

"Of course I am assuming that none of my children will have friends who are undesirable," went on the Colonel quietly. "As a youngster I would never think of bringing home a fellow that I thought my father would not approve of. Now, then, be off as soon as you like. It's a splendid afternoon, and the air on the Heath is glorious to-day."

The battle had ended in a kind of compromise. Indeed it was not a battle at all. Rather it was only a kind of preliminary skirmish, which had settled nothing.

Peggy, however, felt differently. The fact that her father had consented to her bringing Barnes to the house gave her a sense of victory. Mrs. Trelawney had told her, again and again, that the Colonel would never dream of allowing such a thing, and now after what she called her first pitched battle, her father had capitulated without conditions, made her feel confident of the future.

"It's all right, Eleanor," she cried, "we've won all along the line."

"Don't be silly, kid."

"I'm not silly. Why, he gave way in everything."

"He gave way in nothing."

"Nothing? Why, the fact that I'm bringing Jim home is proof that he has."

"Nothing of the sort. He's allowing you to bring him here that he may see what kind of fellow he is."

"My dear girl, don't you see? It's the thin end of the wedge. He's afraid we shall do something desperate, if we don't have our way. All we've got to do is to be firm."

"I mean to be anyhow," was Eleanor's reply. "On the whole I'm glad we've had this breeze. It's cleared the air, and it's given us some idea as to where we are. At any rate, we've let him see that we mean to stick to our guns."

"That's the glory of it. I promised to meet Jim at four o'clock. What are you going to do?"

"I say, Peg, you are silly about that fellow. You'll be tired of him in a few weeks."

"I shan't be anything of the sort. I know he's not your kind; but I mean to marry him."

"Marry him! You are a silly idiot."

"Well, I do, and my lordly father will soon have to know it."

"But, my dear girl, he can't keep you."

"Yes, he can. He's making a good deal of money now, and he'll be making a good deal more soon."

"But—but my dear girl, he's not Father's sort, you know."

"He's fifty times finer looking than any of your men friends. As for our pattern boy, he just looks shabby and commonplace beside him."

The truth was Peggy, since her father's return, and

fearing what he might say and do, had become more and more enamoured with Barnes. She dreaded the thought of losing him, and wondered if the Colonel would take some steps to separate them. At the dance on the previous evening, when Barnes was somewhat heated with his libations, he had told Peggy that he was not going to stand any nonsense, and had hinted to her that plenty of girls with lots of money could be his for the asking. Poor child, utterly inexperienced, and lacking in judgment as she was, she looked on him as a kind of Apollo. She did not see how common he was, or realize, in spite of what her brother had told her, that he would be regarded as a rank outsider. Perhaps if she had, it would have made no difference. Barnes' love-making had carried her off her feet, and owing to the fact that she had been working among curious people at the munition factory, her sense of values had been utterly distorted.

"Where are you going?" asked Peggy as she saw her sister preparing to go out.

"I'm going to the Amazon Club for tea," replied Eleanor, "and since our long-lost and autocratic papa has given his lordly consent for us to bring our friends home, I shall ask Tamsin Cory back to supper."

The girls left the house soon after, and the Colonel was left alone with his wife.

"I'm so glad you didn't come to any open rupture," remarked Mrs. Trelawney, with a sigh.

"I'm afraid that'll not be the end of it, though," replied the Colonel. "Really, I did not think things had gone so far."

CHAPTER VII

RODERICK RAVENSCROFT

ABOUT seven o'clock that evening the door-bell rang and Mrs. Trelawney sprang to her feet as if to leave the room.

"Where are you going, Alice?" asked the Colonel.

"To open the door," she replied.

"But why?"

"Because the servants have gone out. At least the housemaid and parlour-maid have. As for the cook, she refuses to answer the door-bell."

"But should you have allowed your help to go out when you expect people in to supper?"

"My dear, I'm afraid you don't understand. If I tried to keep them in, they'd give notice immediately. And if they left me I don't know where I should get others. You see——"

"All right, Alice. Stay here. I'll answer the door. I expect it's only John and young Davenport."

When the Colonel opened the door, however, he found a stranger.

"Colonel Trelawney?" queried the visitor.

"That is my name."

"Excuse me for calling, Colonel, but I took the liberty of paying a chance visit. My name is Ravenscroft—Roderick Ravenscroft."

"What, not the son of my old friend Dick Ravenscroft?"

"Yes, sir. I believe you and he were at school together."

he writes saying he's afraid he'll have to go to Ireland. If he can't come home, I must try and run down to Plymouth this week, as naturally I want to see him badly. But John seems to be doing well."

"John's a fine fellow," said Ravenscroft heartily.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," was the Colonel's reply. "I've been greatly pleased with what I've seen of him, and his mother tells me that he's been a great help to her."

"A thoroughly straight, dependable chap is John. You'll find him very thoughtful and intelligent, too."

"Have you made a friend of him?"

"Yes, in a way. Of course, he's several years my junior, but we've hit it very well. I don't know whether Mrs. Trelawney has told you, sir, but I've taken the liberty of calling here several times these last few months," and Ravenscroft flushed as he spoke.

"That's right," replied the Colonel heartily. "I'm glad you have. I have only just begun to realize what a hard, lonely time my wife has had while I've been away. I am sure she will have appreciated your visits."

"The truth is," stammered Ravenscroft, "I—I've been very much interested in coming. I've been in rather a dilemma, too. You see your being away from home made everything very difficult. I thought I ought to tell Mrs. Trelawney, and yet I was not sure. Then I heard you were coming and I thought I'd wait."

The Colonel looked at him intently. "I'm not sure I understand," he said.

"No, I'm afraid I've put it badly. To tell you the truth, sir, I'm in love with Eleanor."

The Colonel opened his eyes very wide. "I had no suspicion of such a thing," he said. "My wife has not said a word about it."

"No, I've never told her, sir. I didn't feel as though I ought, especially when I heard you were coming home.

But I felt that—that you should know. I did not want to come here under false pretences. But until I felt sure you'd approve of me, I thought I'd no right to speak. And yet I couldn't keep away from the house."

"Have you spoken to Eleanor?"

"No, sir, not yet. But I'm sure she knows my feelings, and from the fact that she's always seemed glad to see me when I came—I—I kept on coming. I hope you understand, sir. I wanted to do the straight thing. I told my father about it, and he seemed to think that as you were away from home and therefore could know nothing about me that—I was in a difficulty. But I thought I would come to-night in the hope of a few minutes' chat alone. I hope it's all right, sir?" and the young fellow looked anxiously into the Colonel's face.

"Let me understand," replied the Colonel. "From what I gather you have come to the house several times lately, and that you've fallen in love with Eleanor?"

"That's it, sir,"—this in eager tones.

"But as I was away from home you didn't think it right to speak to her."

"Well, sir, I heard you'd be coming home shortly, and my father thought I'd better wait till you came. He made me feel that it would scarcely be the straight thing to become engaged to her, that is assuming she liked me enough, until you knew what kind of a fellow I was. Of course I could have asked Mrs. Trelawney, but that would have been different. I didn't want to take advantage of your absence, sir."

Roderick Ravenscroft appealed to the Colonel strongly. He reminded him of the old-fashioned courtesies which were dear to him, and the honest, outspoken frankness aroused his admiration.

"Of course I can quite understand that you'd like to know more about me before you said anything definite,"

went on Ravenscroft eagerly. "But I'm dead in earnest, sir. You know my people and I did fairly well during the war. There are lots of people in Hampstead who know me and can tell you what kind of fellow I am. Of course I shan't be in a position to marry for a year or so, but—but things are coming my way. In fact, I've a fairly big thing on hand now, and—and—it's difficult to say it, sir, but—but—I've kept straight, and—and I've never had any entanglements with girls, or anything of that sort."

The Colonel hesitated before speaking again. As far as he could see, Ravenscroft was a fine young fellow. He admired his manliness, his simplicity, and his old-fashioned courtesy. But he was not quite sure of his ground. He called to mind the scene in "The Treadmill" a few hours before, and he wondered whether Ravenscroft had any inkling of Eleanor's state of mind. He wondered, too, whether he was fully aware of the kind of girl she was.

"You say you have not spoken to Eleanor?"

"That is so, sir; as I told you, I did not think it right to speak in your absence, especially as you were shortly coming home. But I'm sure she knows."

"And do you know much of her? Have you seen a great deal of her?"

"Not as much as I should have liked. As luck would have it, my father has been able to put a good deal of work in my way, and I've been very busy. But I've come here whenever I could, and I've taken her to amusements two or three times."

"But you've never said anything definite?—you've never asked her to become engaged to you?"

"No, sir. I've told you why."

"And have you reason to think she would say yes?"

"I hope so, sir. Of course I'm not sure, and—and sometimes I've not quite been able to understand her.

But I'm in dead earnest, and I thought I ought to tell you. I wanted to come here very much, but I thought—it—was your right to know why I came."

"I appreciate your candour and your sincerity," replied the Colonel, "and I am sure you are a worthy son of my old friend. But as you may imagine, this is all very strange to me. When I left home, Eleanor was only a child, and I cannot accustom myself to the idea that she is now twenty-one. Besides, I've hardly had time to look around and understand my bearings. I came home only last Monday, and I've been from early to late at the War Office and the Foreign Office ever since. That means that I've hardly had time to make the acquaintance of my own children. But let me say this at once. I shall be glad to see you here whenever you care to come. As for speaking to Eleanor, I think you'd better let it stand over for a time. I am saying that because —well, for one thing, although you are the son of my old friend, I don't know you. Mind, I like what I've seen of you, and if Eleanor reciprocates your feelings I feel sure —anyhow, let matters take their own course for a bit, and—and I shall be delighted to welcome you whenever you care to pay a visit to the house. Ah, surely that's John's voice."

"Helloa, Rod, old man," cried John, who entered the room just then. "I'm glad to see you. You know Davenport, don't you?"

"Rather," replied Ravenscroft; "we were together in the Monttiddier show," and he shook hands with the man John had brought with him.

"Oh, don't rub in that," laughed John.

"Rub in what?"

"The fact that Davenport was in at the finish. He's always crowing over me about it. He seems to think because I 'fagged' for him at Rugby, that he has the right to assume *superior airs.* But I can't help not being born

two or three years before. I tried hard enough to get out."

"The army is no place for children, John, my boy," said Davenport very solemnly.

"I say, Dad," cried John, "please forgive me. This is Davenport whom I told you about. I hope you'll take him in hand. He's not quite so bad as he looks, and if you treat him kindly he may, in time, turn out quite all right. His people are quite intelligent, too."

The Colonel liked Davenport, and he saw at a glance that he was one of his own sort. He had a sense of humour, too, and the Colonel soon found himself hugely enjoying a wordy combat that went on between the three young men.

This was something like what he hoped his home would be. He was far from being an old man, and the sound of young voices was pleasant to his ears. He began to hope that, after all, things with Eleanor and Peggy were not so bad as he feared. He reflected that they were only children, and in spite of the fact that they had become infected with thoughts that were repugnant to him he would be able, by wise management, to lead them into better ways. Of course Ravenscroft's confession came to him rather as a shock, but as he watched the young man's face he almost hoped that Eleanor would fall in love with him, if she had not already done so. To say the least of it, he was a fine fellow, and would be a husband of whom any girl might be proud.

But did Ravenscroft really know the kind of girl Eleanor was, and was he aware of Peggy's infatuation with the fellow Barnes? The thing was not pleasant to think about, and he looked forward with anything but pleasant anticipation to his coming. From what his wife had told him, he was a flashy, underbred sort of chap who had taken advantage of Peggy's foolishness, and established himself as a kind of fiancé of his daughter. If this were

so, and assuming that Eleanor was fond of Ravenscroft, there might be unpleasant complications. He could see at a glance that Ravenscroft was a gentleman, and if Barnes were what he suspected, he would naturally resent any association with him. The Colonel almost wished he had not consented to Peggy bringing him that night. In a way it might be taken as a kind of consent on his part to Barnes being received as a probable son-in-law.

At any rate he must make the best of it, and be guided by developments. The part he had to play was anything but pleasant, and one which he had never dreamt of. For upon one thing he had fully determined: If Barnes proved to be the kind of fellow he feared he was, he would certainly put an end to his friendship with Peggy, and forbid his having any further connection with the family.

A little later, voices were heard in the hall, and the Colonel judged by the flush on Ravenscroft's face that he had heard Eleanor speaking. In this he proved to be right, for at that moment Eleanor entered accompanied by a woman of from twenty-eight to thirty years of age.

"I hope I'm not intruding, Colonel," this lady said after Eleanor had presented her as Miss Tamsin Cory.

"On the other hand," replied the Colonel, "I hope I shall always have pleasure in welcoming my children's friends."

Miss Cory was not slow to recognize the non-committal nature of this remark, but not being a lady of a very sensitive nature, and also being deceived by the Colonel's courteous tones, had no suspicion of his real thoughts concerning her.

"I hear you've been away a number of years," she ventured.

"Yes—six."

"And kind of out of the world, too, I suppose."

"Yes, if you can call India and Mesopotamia out of the world."

"Well, I do, in a way. Although I hear the people of India are waking up. From what I can gather the old order of things has passed away, even there. I shouldn't be surprised if we lose our Indian Empire. And a good thing, too."

"And why?" asked the Colonel.

"It shows the movements of the age. It shows that the old, bad past has come to an end. Why should a little island like England govern a huge peninsula like India? I believe in self-determination for all peoples and races, in relation to government."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. All the thought of the age is in that direction. Individually and nationally the world has been in swaddling clothes too long. No real progress is possible without absolute freedom to live our own lives both nationally and individually. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not sure I quite understand you," replied the Colonel.

"I dare say not. You see you've been out of it for several years."

"Yes, I've been doing my best to help in the government of races who don't know how to govern themselves."

"But I say, Eleanor, I haven't seen your mother yet. I hope she's well."

"I'm sorry," said Eleanor, "but I think Mother will be waiting for Peggy. I can't think where she is. She promised to be here by half-past seven. Ah, here she is."

The Colonel glanced towards the door as his daughter spoke. As she had said, Peggy entered at that moment, accompanied by a young man.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUPPER PARTY

BARNES had evidently dressed for the occasion. His clothes were carefully pressed and his detachable cuffs were pulled to the right position over his hands. He wore a ring on each hand, and an imitation pearl in his tie pin. A coloured, silk handkerchief protruded from the breast pocket of his jacket, and he had taken great care that what he considered a sufficient quantity of it should appear. His black hair had been abundantly greased, and was brushed back from his forehead in the most approved fashion.

The Colonel gave him a rapid glance and then moved towards him. At any rate the man was under his roof as his guest, and he could do no other than be courteous.

"This is Jim," said Peggy a little defiantly.

"Jim?" queried the Colonel.

"Yes, Jim Barnes." It would seem that Peggy had received instructions as to the manner of introduction.

"Mr. Barnes? How do you do, Mr. Barnes?"

"Proud to meet you, Colonel. I hope you are well, sir?"

"Yes, I'm very well, thank you."

"Of course I've heard a good deal about you, sir, as doubtless you've heard a good deal about me."

"I'm afraid you have the advantage of me there, Mr. Barnes," replied the Colonel. "But supper is ready. Shall we go into the dining-room?"

"Now this is just what I like," remarked Barnes when they had taken their seats. "Just a homely sort of meal. Personally I don't believe in dressing for dinner on a Sunday night. I'm old-fashioned, I am. Dinner in the

middle of the day on Sunday, I say, and cold beef and pickles for supper. No dress clothes, and no servants botherin' around."

There was dead silence at this. For the moment Peggy was too nervous to talk, and it might seem that Barnes did not appeal much to the others. But he was not to be suppressed by silence, and he determined to be much in evidence.

"How are you getting on, old thing?" he continued, turning to John. "Is the motor trade going hot?"

"Were you speaking to me, Mr. Barnes?" asked John innocently.

"Of course I was. You are the motor expert, aren't you? I suppose I shall see you sporting a Rolls-Royce soon?"

"No, Mr. Barnes, I don't know whether you are aware of it, but the Rolls-Royce is a very expensive car, and I am very poor."

"Oh, but that's no obstacle. Hosts of people get cars on the hire system. It's the same with furniture. I dare say you've seen ads about it. Isn't that so, Ravenscroft?"

"I really never noticed," replied Ravenscroft. "I was never well enough off to afford motor cars."

"Come off the roof, old bean," laughed Barnes, "and don't think you can kid yours truly."

Ravenscroft did not reply. To tell the truth he was surprised to see a man of the Barnes order, sitting at the Colonel's table, although he took no apparent notice. He looked towards Eleanor, but she was busy talking with her friend Tamsin Cory, and did not seem to be listening to what Barnes was saying.

As for that gentleman, although he continued to talk freely, he could not help feeling that he was not making a good impression. To his surprise his sallies did not meet with the approval he expected and he could not

quite understand the look on the Colonel's face. Still he felt quite sure of himself. He reflected that he was not only the best dressed, but the best looking man in the room, and he had a sense of exhilaration that he was sitting at Colonel Trelawney's table with that gentleman's consent.

"I suppose you find things a lot changed in England, Colonel?" he went on presently.

"Changed? How?"

"Well, I say for the better, although it's a debatable question. But there it is. A man is valued for what he's worth in these days. The spirit of democracy is abroad. Why, one of the biggest guns in the army was once a golf-caddie! There are some who object to the idea, but all honour to him, I say."

"Still I don't understand you."

"No, well, I suppose that in the old days, a man couldn't be an officer unless he was a bit of a swell, but the war has knocked all that to smithereens. Not but what we've gone a bit too far. I say that Tommy Atkins would rather serve under a gentleman than under one of his own class. Therefore, although I am liberal in my opinions, I say we ought to stick to the old spirit which made the saying 'an officer and a gentleman.' The first ought always to mean the last. Don't you think so, Colonel?"

"Certainly," replied the Colonel; "but what constitutes a gentleman, Mr. Barnes?"

"That's a bit of a poser, Colonel. You've got me below the belt. Still, although there are no airs about me, I believe in old Lord Salisbury. He used to say that a gentleman always *wanted* to dress for dinner. There's something in it, you know. Not but what I prefer this kind of thing on a Sunday night. It may not be so classy as a regular dinner, but it's more homely. But as a regular thing, a gentleman likes to dress."

"And that constitutes a gentleman?"

"In a way it does. Don't you think so? Of course there are other things."

"I'm going to get a job as a waiter right away," laughed Davenport.

"One to you, old sport," laughed Barnes. "But look here, Davvy, you know I'm right in the main."

"Chivalry to women might also be regarded as a mark of a gentleman," remarked Miss Tamsin Cory.

"Glad to hear you say that, Tamsin," replied Barnes. "Be always polite to the ladies is my motto; but isn't that a bit off your track?"

"I don't see why."

"Because you claim absolute equality between the sexes. Be straight now. If women are the equals of men, why should men treat women differently from what they treat men?"

"One thing has struck me since my return home," put in the Colonel. "In the old days a gentleman always felt it his duty to be polite to ladies; but that seems to have altered. I've noticed it in the subways, which are terribly crowded just now. Men will keep their seats, and let women stand."

"There may be more than one reason for that, Colonel," remarked Ravenscroft.

"Tell me what you mean, Rod, my boy," rejoined the Colonel.

Ravenscroft flushed with pleasure at hearing the Colonel speak to him in such a friendly way. "It's just this, sir," he replied. "In the early days of the war all the conveyances got terribly crowded and then it was the exception for a man to sit while a woman was standing. Men practically always gave up their seats to women. Now I know it's different. But haven't women themselves to blame?"

"How's that?"

"Well, for one thing, what men gladly gave them as a courtesy, women claimed as a right. That put men's backs up. But that's not all. I think men respect women less than they did."

"How? Why?"

"Because women have become less womanly. I think it's the natural instinct of every decent man to honour women as women. But when they hear women swearing; when they see them, young girls especially, smoking and drinking in public places; when they hear them discussing delicate questions without a suggestion of womanly reserve; when, in short, they see them losing their modesty, men naturally refuse to pay homage to them."

"That's all bunk," remarked Tamsin Cory.

"Of course you know the present-day young woman better than I do," retorted Ravenscroft, "but that's how it strikes me."

"Then you don't believe in the advancement of women?"

"Depends what you mean by advancement."

"I mean this. Woman of your Jane Austen type was a backboneless, simpering miss who was flabby, bloodless, without an opinion of her own. Her business was to get a husband, and when she'd got him it was her duty to be the chattel of the man, to breed children, to look after the house, and be her husband's slave, generally. What I mean by woman's advancement is that she should be the man's equal in every respect, that she should be free to live her own life; that she should choose whether she'll have children or not, and be free to do all that a man does. Why should a woman be a man's slave? Why shouldn't she have exactly the same liberty a man has? Why should it be thought immodest for a woman to propose to a man, and why should she be tied down to

the moral code which men have set up for women, while they have their fling?"

"Exactly," replied Ravenscroft; "that's why men are ceasing to pay homage to women."

"Then women can do very well without men's homage—as you call it. For my own part I demand freedom to live my own life in my own way, and every other woman of spirit demands to do the same."

"I think your question as to the reason why men don't feel called upon to give up their seats for women as they did years ago is answered, Colonel," laughed Ravenscroft.

The Colonel was silent. During Tamsin Cory's long speech he had been looking at Eleanor and Peggy, noting the eager look on their faces.

"Tamsin is fair on it to-night, isn't she?" remarked Barnes. "Go to it, Tammy, old girl. I play the winner."

"Oh, I know my views don't suit a certain class of men," retorted Tamsin, "but I put it to you, Mr. Ravenscroft—suppose you were born a woman, how would you like your liberties restricted? How would you like to have to play second fiddle to men? How would you like to have to recognize one standard for men, and another for women? How would you like to be man's obedient slave? Don't you think women are equal to men?"

"I think that the Almighty meant them to be superior," replied Ravenscroft, "and——"

"Oh, save us from any pious piffle," interrupted Tamsin.

"I think the Almighty meant them to be superior to men," repeated Ravenscroft, "only women are giving up their superiority in order to gain equality. Not all, I'm glad to think. There are still a number who realize wherein a woman's true power lies. But there's a new spirit in the age, and that spirit doesn't improve women."

"But look here," cried Tamsin, eager for battle.

"What would you have women be? You talked just now about girls smoking and drinking in public places. Why shouldn't they, if they want? Men do. Men swear if they want to. Why shouldn't women? Would you have young girls think that babies are found under gooseberry bushes? Why shouldn't they know all there is to be known? Why shouldn't they talk about the facts of life, whatever they are, freely and frankly? And if they feel any law or custom is wrong, whether it's moral or physical, why shouldn't they break them?"

"You think they should, I imagine?"

"Certainly I do. Why shouldn't they, if they want? Are we to be tied down to such worn-out superstitions as marriage, and all sorts of cramping, paralyzing codes of propriety and morals?"

"Then you believe in absolute liberty for women?"

"I believe in exactly the same liberty for a woman as for a man. A father gives his son a latch-key; why shouldn't he give one to his daughter? A young fellow goes to a public dance without a chaperon, why shouldn't a girl? A young fellow has his fling, why shouldn't his sister, if he has one, have the same liberty?"

"Buck up, old bean," cried Barnes, as Ravenscroft hesitated before replying. "Tammy has scored on you up to now. Go in for the respectable side, Roddy, and trot out your arguments."

An angry flush mounted Ravenscroft's cheeks. He resented Barnes' impertinence, and felt like snubbing him. He glanced at the Colonel, and wondered what he thought of the conversation. To say the least of it, it seemed strange that he should allow such sentiments expressed in his house, and he wondered if he (Ravenscroft) would be within the bounds of good taste to continue the conversation. He judged by the look in the Colonel's eyes, however, that he wished him to answer

Tamsin, so while he was anything but comfortable he determined to go on.

"It's not altogether a matter of argument, *Mr.* Barnes," he said with a slight emphasis on the "Mr.," "it's also a question of good taste. For example, I was in the smoking-room of a golf club the other day, and a girl about twenty came in. She threw herself in an arm-chair, crossed her legs which were freely exposed, took out a cigarette, lit it, and then ordered a liquor. The waiter was rather long in bringing it, and when he did appear she asked him with the aid of some swear words what he'd been so long about."

"Well, what's wrong about that?" asked Tamsin. "You'd have thought nothing of a man doing it."

"I don't know about that," replied Ravenscroft, "but I do know that it didn't give me a very high opinion of the girl. Even though you may claim it was not wrong, it seemed to me in very bad taste. Some of the men who were there winked at each other. Others lifted their eyebrows. After all, there's such a thing as womanliness."

"But what was unwomanly? What's wrong in a cigarette? I'm hoping to smoke a few after supper. What's wrong in a liquor? Men have it. And if a man swears at a stupid waiter, why shouldn't a girl?"

"At any rate it goes to show why men are losing their honour for women," replied Ravenscroft.

"But surely," interrupted the Colonel, "you are not serious in what you have just said? Such things were not dreamt of ten years ago—that is among nice girls."

"Oh, it's not at all uncommon," replied Ravenscroft. "A new spirit has come into the age, and girls laugh at things, which years ago would have shocked them. I suppose I have old-fashioned tastes, but think of the dances which are all the rage. Think, too, of the way girls dress, or don't dress. We may laugh at old ideas,

but the modern young woman doesn't help one to despise those ideas."

"Noah and the Ark are more in your line, Rod," laughed Peggy.

"Personally," said the Colonel, "I find Rod's views very much to my way of thinking."

"But surely, Colonel," burst in Tamsin Cory, "you are not serious? You are a man of the world, and you can't agree with that tosh?"

"I'm mortally sure I do."

"Well, I'm d——d!" muttered Tamsin under her breath.

"It's not only that," interposed Mrs. Trelawney, "there seems to be a different standard of morals from what there was, especially among young girls. It's seen among them in every class. Some time ago, I got a new servant. After she had been with me three days, she took her night out. I told her I expected her home at half-past ten. She didn't say anything, but went out. Half-past ten came, then half-past eleven, and she did not appear. I went to bed. The following morning when she returned, I took her to task, but she refused to tell me where she had been or what she had been doing. In fact she resented my enquiring into what she called 'her private affairs.'"

"Of course that's a bit strong," said Tamsin, "but we shall have to adapt our ideas. That's all."

"I'll give up housekeeping first," was Mrs. Trelawney's retort.

"The fact is," went on Tamsin, "we may as well settle it first as last, that the old order of things is dead. There is a new spirit in the air, as Ravenscroft has said. For my own part I think it is good. Think of the old ideas about marriage. When a woman got married she promised to stay with one man and keep only to him till death. But it's *against* human nature, so why not

away with such exploded fallacies? Personally if the institution of marriage is to continue at all, I would have divorce made easy. But there, perhaps I am treading on delicate ground."

"I think you are," replied the Colonel somewhat grimly.

"All the same such things will have to be faced," went on Tamsin. "I'm pretty moderate myself, but revolution is in the air. The old cruel, unnatural bandages are being snapped, superstitious religions and otherwise are being exploded."

"Have we all finished?" asked the Colonel; "if so, I'll return thanks, and then we'll go into the lounge."

Two hours later the Colonel saw his guests to the door. It was easy to see that he was annoyed, and yet curiously interested. In many respects the evening had been a revelation to him, and he was more perturbed than he had been since his return. His eyes had become hard, his features set.

"No, don't go to bed yet," he said to Eleanor and Peggy, who were preparing to leave the room.

"Why, have you anything to say to us?" asked Eleanor.

"Yes, I have."

CHAPTER IX

"I'M ENGAGED TO JIM"

"AM I to understand," said the Colonel, turning to Peggy, "that any love passages have passed between you and this man Barnes?"

"Well, what if there have?"

"I'm asking a question."

"Yes, I'm engaged to Jim," cried Peggy defiantly.

"Without my knowledge or consent?"

"How could I get that when you were away?"

"Without your mother's consent then?"

"Mother knew I was fond of him. I've done nothing sneaky, I brought him home. I told Mother what I meant to do."

"And do you really mean to tell me that you've engaged yourself to him?"

"I've promised I'll marry him, yes."

"You, a child of eighteen!"

"What's that to do with it? I'm old enough to know my own mind. I'm not a kid. I know what's what."

"Then my consent doesn't count?"

"I don't see why it should if I like him."

"Very well. I see where we stand. Now then, I want to say this. I absolutely forbid you to have any further associations with him in any form."

"You mean to say that you forbid him to come here?"

"Absolutely."

"Why, what has he done? Besides, I don't care what you say. I'm fond of Jim and I shall marry him."

"Not with my consent."

"Why, what have you against him?"

"I've everything against him. He isn't a gentleman. He's just a common bounder."

"He's nothing of the sort. He's as good as your pattern boy there. He's better looking, he's more of a gentleman, and—and I don't care what you say."

"Now, Peggy, let there be no misunderstanding. I allowed you to bring him here, to-night, because of what you said about him, and because of what your mother told me. I decided to see him and judge for myself. Well, I have seen him, I've listened to him, I've watched his face, I've summed up his character, and I've made up my mind about him. Why, can't you see the kind of fellow he is? Don't your own instincts help you to see that he has nothing in common with us?"

"That's pure snobbery!" cried Peggy in a rage. "I can see what you've got against him. You say he isn't a gentleman. You are a snob, that's what you are. Just a snob. Isn't a real estate agent just as good as a motor-mechanic? And that's what your own son is. He was an officer in the army, just as you are yourself."

"His business, or his profession has nothing to do with my judgment of him," replied the Colonel. "I don't object to him because of his evident lack of education, or even of good manners, although those things are important. But he's common by instinct, he's a common bounder to the heart's core. And more than that, he's not a good chap. I tell you this, much as I might have been grieved, if you had told me you were fond of a bricklayer, a plumber, or any sort of mechanic, and I found him to be clean-minded, and had the instincts of a gentleman, I wouldn't have minded so much. I don't say I shouldn't have tried to dissuade you. I probably should. In any case I should have insisted on your waiting a year or two until you were old enough to form a judgment. But I wouldn't have met you with a *non possumus*. But this fellow has not the *suggestion* of a

gentleman. He's vulgar through and through, and more than that, he's without manliness or principle. He hasn't right feelings."

"He's good enough for me, anyhow," defied Peggy.

"I hope not, I sincerely hope not," replied the Colonel. "Anyhow my mind's made up."

"And so is mine."

"You mean to disobey me?"

"Yes. If you won't give your consent to my marrying Jim, I shall marry him without."

The Colonel was on the point of speaking angrily, but he restrained himself. He had for hours been suffering keenly, and his nerves were getting raw, but he realized that, perhaps, the whole future of his children's lives hung in the balance, and he was anxious that no hasty word of his should be thrown in the wrong scale.

"Peggy, my dear," he said, "I am not saying this so much for my own sake as for yours. If you were to do as you say, you will regret it within six months. I tell you he's a bad fellow."

"I don't want a plaster of Paris saint. Besides, I don't believe what people say about him. You've been listening to a lot of gossip."

"I've been listening to nothing, and I know nothing but what I've seen and heard for myself. That, however, is enough for me. I forbid him to come to the house. I forbid you to have anything to do with him. If he comes here again, I shall show him the door."

"If you do I shall go to him."

"I sincerely hope not. If you do, you go to your own ruin."

In spite of her turbulent spirit Peggy was for the moment silenced. There was something not only in her father's words, but in his presence that made her afraid. A great dread came into her heart that he spoke the truth.

"Personally I do not support her in all her views; all the same I am sure she has good reasons for holding them."

The Colonel was for a few seconds speechless with indignation. That his daughter, a girl of twenty-one years of age, should have such ideas was almost more than he could bear.

"Really, Father," went on Eleanor, "I think you are entirely unreasonable. Such questions are in the air and will have to be faced. You do not seem to realize that we live in a new age, and that people are thinking out the problems of life for themselves."

"And might one ask whether you favour this woman's so-called liberal ideas on marriage?"

"I? Oh, I hate the idea of marriage. To me it is detestable. That's why I think Peggy is a fool to be fond of Jim Barnes. But that's her affair. Each person must do what he or she thinks best. No one has the right to interfere in another's conduct of his or her own life."

She spoke with perfect calmness, and although her tremulous lips and quivering fingers showed that she was much excited, she was able to control her voice perfectly.

"I suppose these are the thoughts you have imbibed from your friends?" asked the Colonel.

"I don't know who I got them from, neither does it seem to me that it matters. But I claim the right to think for myself, and act for myself."

"Then I suppose your mother and I don't count?"

Eleanor was silent.

"Anyhow," went on the Colonel, "I absolutely forbid such friendships as that of this woman. I will not have her, or her sort, here."

"Perhaps you remember the old saying about Mahomet and the mountain?" replied Eleanor coolly.

"Is that a threat?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Oh, please, please, don't quarrel!" cried Mrs. Trelawney. "Eleanor, can't you see how foolish, how unfilial you are?"

"I have no wish to quarrel," replied Eleanor. "It is so vulgar."

"Then you refuse to obey me?" asked the Colonel.

"Call it what you like," replied the girl. "Have you anything more to say? I'm rather tired, and such scenes as this bore me."

Without another word she rose and left the room, followed by Peggy, the Colonel watching them with sad eyes.

"Oh, what shall we do?" wailed Mrs. Trelawney. "You can't drive them out of the house, darling. Think what might become of them if you did. And after all, they are only children."

The Colonel did not speak. He felt that he had come to an *impasse*. He dreaded the thought of them leaving home, and yet that was doubtless what they had in their minds if he did not yield to their way of thinking. Peggy he thought he understood, but Eleanor was a problem that baffled him entirely.

"I must go to them, I really must!" cried Mrs. Trelawney. "This is really worse than I thought. I hoped, oh, I did hope, that when you came home you'd put matters right. But they seem worse than ever. Mayn't I tell them that you'll take time to consider, or—or something of that sort?"

"No," replied the Colonel.

"But I may go to them, mayn't I?"

"That goes without saying, Alice. They are your children as much as they are mine, but please don't lead them to think I shall yield in this matter."

"But I want to tell them that you are acting for their good, and that—that *you love* them."

"I think they know that. They *must* know it. All the same no child of mine shall have her life ruined by such a fellow as Barnes if I can help it; while that woman Cory's thoughts are just poison."

"But what if they persist, darling? You see how headstrong they are. And really I don't see what you can do."

"Nor can I—at present."

Mrs. Trelawney gave him a despairing look, and left the room, while John looked at his father wonderingly.

"John, my boy, come into my study with me, will you?"

John followed his father into The Den without a word. He wondered why he wanted him.

"This is a bad business, my boy," said the Colonel as he lit his pipe. "I'm awfully sorry it should have happened, but I don't think I could have helped it."

"No, Dad, I don't think you could."

"I feel rather lonely, rather helpless, and very sad," went on the Colonel. "I had looked forward to a different home-coming. I naturally thought, too, that my girls' friends would be such as I could gladly welcome, just as I welcome Ravenscroft and Davenport. Those are good chaps, John, and I'm glad you know them. I shall always be pleased to see them here."

John flushed with pleasure. As his mother had said, he had become something of a hero-worshipper, and the boy's heart had gone out to his father.

"My boy," continued the Colonel, "I want your help."

"In what way, Dad? I don't understand."

"It's difficult to tell you. But you can see how I am situated. Those two girls are utterly turbulent, utterly defiant. They mean to go their own way altogether regardless of me, and that will mean their ruin. Don't you *think so?*"

"With Peggy," assented John. "As for Eleanor—I don't know."

"*How* don't you know?"

"She's a curious girl. She was always very reserved, and would never make a pal of me."

"And Peggy?"

"We used to hit it off very well till she took up with that fellow Barnes. It's this way," went on John. "The war upset everything and Mother got terribly bothered."

"How?"

"It was the money business, sir. Everything became twice as dear and—and I'm afraid Trev was extravagant. Mother didn't know what to do. As you already know, Eleanor got a job in a Government office, and was earning good money. She's very clever. She learned to do things like magic; but she didn't bring much money home. That was why *I* got a job. Mr. Davenport took me on, and—and said I was very useful. Then Peg insisted on leaving school, and working at a munition factory. That, I think, led to everything else."

"In what way?"

"There was a curious lot of people at these munition factories. Some of the girls were a bad lot, and many of them were very common."

"Yes, I had a pretty good idea about this," replied the Colonel, "but what made you think that although there might be danger for Peggy, you weren't sure about Eleanor?"

"I don't know much about girls, sir, they are not much in my line; I've been too busy about—other things. But Peg's hot and passionate, while Eleanor's as cold as an icicle. She calculates about everything. She isn't like most girls. Excuse me, sir, but I accidentally heard a fellow talking about her one day, and he described her as sexless. That's why I—I doubt whether there's any danger for her. *She's fond of* dress, and she goes her

own way; but men don't seem to have any attraction for her. Peg is all the other way."

The Colonel was silent for a few seconds, while John flushed a fiery red at his own speech.

"Do you know anything about Barnes?" asked the Colonel.

"A common bounder," cried John savagely. "I say, Dad, I'm awfully sorry for you. I did my best to help Mother. But girls are just awful in these days. I went one night to one of these public dances—jazz dances, you know, and the way some of the girls talked was simply awful. You've no idea."

"Tell me what you mean, my son. Remember that I was once a young fellow just as you are, and can understand you."

"Oh, I don't know that I came up against anything that you'd call absolutely wrong; but—but I danced with a girl who was living in a flat with two other girls. She told me that they did this because their parents refused them latch-keys, and wouldn't allow them to live their own life, as she called it. They were supposed to be respectable girls, and they'd all got jobs whereby they paid their own way. She introduced me to the other girls afterwards, and they invited me and two other fellows to take them home to their flat after the dance."

"And did you go?"

"No, sir. I didn't. I knew Mother wouldn't like it. I couldn't conceive of *her* doing such a thing when she was a girl."

"Thank God, you couldn't!" ejaculated the Colonel.

"I don't think they—they—meant anything wrong, sir," stammered John, "but there you have it. Thousands of girls in London, in order to live their own lives, as they call it, go off 'on their own,' and often, from what I hear, things turn out badly."

"*You* mean that they go to the bad?"

"It would be a wonder if they didn't, sir. Though, of course, there are lots of them who go perfectly straight."

"I'd no idea things had gone so far," muttered the Colonel to himself.

"Oh, it's quite common from what I hear," rejoined John. "It may be all right to some girls, but others pick up with bad fellows, and—and—they lose their heads. Anyhow, that's the kind of thing *our* girls are up against. Before you came home they did just what they liked with Mother. They frightened her by saying that if they didn't have their own way they'd leave home, and so things just drifted. Peg picked up with Barnes, and Eleanor got mixed up with creatures like Tamsin Cory. I didn't tell you at first, sir; I thought I might do harm, but things are different now."

The Colonel was silent a few seconds. He believed that John, boy though he was, had given a pretty accurate diagnosis of the situation, and it was a great comfort to him to feel that they were friends.

"My boy," he said, laying his hand on John's arm, "you and I, together, must get the girls out of this tangle."

"What can one do?" asked John of the practical mind.

"Can you find out all there is to know about Barnes?"

John's eyes flashed with quick intelligence. "I dare say I could, sir; but I'm afraid it would do no good. You see, Peg doesn't care. She laughs at what she calls 'copy book morality'; and—and doesn't it seem rather a melodramatic way of working?"

The Colonel saw what was going on in the boy's mind, and realized that, quiet and unostentatious as he was, he had a quick brain, and a keen intuition. It was a great joy to the Colonel to have such a son.

"Perhaps it is," he admitted, "but I must save Peg

from marrying a fellow like that. Anyhow I can depend upon you to help me?"

"Yes, sir, that goes without saying; but no one knows what goes on in the mind of a girl like Peg, and Barnes has infatuated her. Besides, you are at the War Office all day, while I have to be at the works."

"Yes, I know. Still, you and I must work together, my boy."

The next morning the Colonel started for Westminster before the girls appeared for breakfast. John, on the other hand, had left the house soon after six. Neither Eleanor nor Peggy appeared till ten, and then both of them refused to make any response to their mother's overtures in order to obtain their confidence. About eleven o'clock both went out together, and neither returned till late in the evening. Both refused to tell their mother where they had been.

Tuesday was practically a repetition of Monday. On Wednesday morning, however, something happened. A letter from Trevor arrived saying that he had been ordered to Ireland, and that if his father wished to see him, he must come to Plymouth immediately.

By the same post, also, the Colonel received the following:

"DEAR COLONEL:

"Peg has told me something which seems to me so outrageous, that I am compelled to write asking you for an interview without delay. Unless I hear from you to the contrary I will do myself the honour of calling at your residence to-morrow (Wednesday) evening about 8:30. Any communication, addressed to 8, Bywell St. W., and reaching there between the hours of 9 and 6, will be delivered to

"Your obedient servant,

"JAMES BARNES."

The signature was ornamented by many flourishes.

CHAPTER X

THE ARMY AND NAVY CLUB INTERVIEW

AT eleven o'clock the following morning Mr. James Barnes received the following note:

"Colonel Trelawney cannot see Mr. Barnes at Hampstead, but if he will be at the Army and Navy Club at 6:30 this evening he will endeavour to give him the interview he asks for."

"Short but to the point," reflected Mr. Barnes. "I thought I would make him sit up."

"Who's writing you from the War Office, Barnes?" asked a fellow clerk, who had handed him the letter, and noticed the official stamp.

"A private matter," replied Barnes, with a superior air.

"Oh, you needn't be so stuck on yourself. Anything to do with back pay?"

"Well, Wilkins, I wouldn't tell everybody," replied Barnes, "but it's a letter from the old man of my little bit of goods."

"What, Colonel Trelawney?"

"Oh, you know his name, do you? How these things leak out. He's some swell, I can tell you. One of the oldest families in England, and all that sort of thing. I hear he's to be made General, and that'll mean a baronetcy, if not something bigger."

"I've heard the Trelawneys are big guns in their way. But I'm told they've no dough to speak of."

"The dough'll be all right, Wilkins, old man. I'm not a bragging sort of chap, but I can go as far as that."

"Is it all settled up, then?"

"As good as settled."

"Do you mean to say that Colonel Trelawney has consented to your marrying his girl?"

"Practically. Between you and me, old man—and this mustn't go any further,—this is a letter from the Colonel inviting me to dine with him at the Army and Navy Club to-night. I expect we shall settle everything up then over a bottle of 'fizz.'"

"Likely story," retorted the other.

"You needn't believe me unless you like," replied Barnes, "but if you want to be convinced, you can come with me to the door of the club. You can't ask for a better proof than that, can you?"

Wilkins was duly impressed. He still had his doubts, but as the envelope evidenced the fact that it came from the War Office and as Barnes spoke so confidently, he concluded that there must be something in it.

"I know I'm marrying a bit above me—in a way," admitted Barnes, "but the Colonel knows what's what. I was up there to supper on Sunday. Lots of swells there. Of course there was no chance to settle things then, but he saw I wasn't the kind of chap to be sneezed at, and he could see that his youngest girl was fair gone on me."

Even yet Wilkins was not quite convinced. He was an open-eyed fellow, and it did not seem at all right that a man of the Barnes stamp would be received by Colonel Trelawney even although things were topsy-turvy, and Peggy was known to have been seen with him. But before the day was out he had told several mutual friends what Barnes had told him, as that gentleman felt sure he would.

Punctually at half-past six, Barnes appeared at the door of the Army and Navy Club. He was rather disturbed about the question of dress, and was not sure whether he ought not to have appeared in what he called

his "war paint." But there was not time after six, at which hour his office closed, for him to get to Camden Town and return by the time the Colonel had mentioned. So he had to make the best of his office attire, and tried to assure himself that he "was as good as the best of 'em."

Still he felt very uncomfortable as he stood at the club door. Never once, in spite of his best endeavours, had he been admitted within its portals. It is true he had had a nodding acquaintance with men who were members there, but they had always treated him very distantly, and never spoke to him except on purely military matters. That was why, although he determined, as he put it, "to stand no lip from any one," he felt rather awed.

He therefore passed into the club, and made his way to an official.

"Is Colonel Trelawney here?" he asked.

The man gave him a quick glance. "What name?" he asked.

Barnes pulled out a card and gave it to him. "You give him that, my man," he said condescendingly. "The Colonel's a friend of mine. I have an appointment with him."

"Will you come this way?" he said to Barnes a few minutes later.

Barnes followed the man up-stairs, and presently found himself in what he took to be a private room where the Colonel sat alone.

"You said you wished to see me," remarked the Colonel as soon as the club servant had gone.

Barnes was taken aback at the Colonel's peremptory manner. It might be that he was back in the army again, and that he had to appear before his C. O. on account of some delinquency. Still he determined to carry out the plan of action on which he had decided.

"My word, Colonel, you do yourself very well here," he remarked pleasantly. "This is a nice club, and no mistake. Of course it's not as fine a building as the old National Liberal, where a man I know used to be a member; still it's more classy."

The Colonel did not speak. He determined to give him no help whatever.

"I've often heard of this place," went on Barnes, "although I was not long enough in the army to get elected a member; but I've been told a great deal about it. I heard one man say that you could get the best whiskey in London here."

"He can't refuse to order a drink after that," he reflected, "and then we shall get on a friendly footing."

But the Colonel ordered no whiskey. He stood in silence waiting for his visitor to state his business.

"Do you mind my sitting down?" persisted Barnes. "I've had a fairly busy day, and feel a bit leggy."

"You wrote saying you wished to see me, Mr. Barnes," was the Colonel's response; "as I have another appointment shortly, I shall be glad if you'll state your business at once."

Barnes felt he was not getting on. His programme was being destroyed at the outset, and he felt at a loss what to say.

"Well, Colonel," he stammered, "when I saw Peg on Monday night I——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the Colonel, "when you saw *whom?*"

"Peg," repeated Barnes; "when I saw Peg—your daughter, you know."

"Since when have I given you permission to call my daughter by a name only used by her family?" asked the Colonel coldly.

"Come now, Colonel," replied Barnes, "that's coming it a *bit too* strong. You know as well as I that we've

been sweet on each other for months. You invited me to come to your house on Sunday night in a friendly way for a bit of supper, and I came. Everything, as I thought, passed off all right, and I quite thought that everything would be settled up between us. But when Peg told me that you wouldn't have me at your house again, in fact when she told me that you had put the 'kybosh' on everything, I felt that I could do no other than demand to have it out with you."

"To have it out with me?" repeated the Colonel.

"Yes. To talk it over quietly as man to man. I don't want any unpleasantness, Colonel, but I tell you straight I'm not the kind of fellow who can take a thing like that lying down. This is not an army matter, this isn't, and you can't come the high horse over me."

"I don't understand your figures of speech, Mr. Barnes. Will you tell me exactly what you wish to say?"

"I've told you straight what I mean. I'm sweet on Peg, and I'm not ashamed of it. We've been going out together for some time, and my people are ready to receive her. As I said before, I accepted your invitation to supper on Sunday in a friendly spirit, but I'm not going to stand being insulted."

"Being insulted?"

"Yes, insulted. Come off the roof and talk it out as man to man, that's what I say. You told Peg that you wouldn't have me at the house again. You told her that she must chuck me. Well, I'm not going to stand being chucked—see? I've got my feelings, and I'm prepared to marry her fair and square in a perfectly honourable way. That's me."

"Let me understand," said the Colonel. "You wish to ask my consent to your being engaged to my daughter? Is that it?"

"Well, in a way *it is*," replied Barnes. "I shouldn't

put it like that myself, for Peg and I have fixed it up between us. Personally I don't want any flim-flam, but since you put it that way, let it be so."

"Thank you," replied the Colonel. "But while I appreciate the honour of your proposal, I cannot give my consent."

For a moment Barnes was nonplussed. He felt that somehow he was making no progress with the man who met all his overtures with cold, cutting politeness.

"At any rate I have a right to ask your reasons for saying that," he blustered.

"Perhaps so, Mr. Barnes, but I do not propose to give them. Please understand, however, that all intimacy, all connections of whatever sort between you and any member of my family must cease."

"Look here," cried Barnes in a rage. "I've asked straight, I have. If you had some chaps to deal with, seeing how sweet Peg is on me, there—there might have been a different story to tell. But I'm doing the honourable thing and I'm d——d if ——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Barnes," interrupted the Colonel, "but this is a gentleman's club, and if you don't moderate both your manner and your speech I shall be obliged to ring for a servant and have you shown out."

"You mean to say that you meet me with a direct refusal, then?"

"Absolutely. Please understand that."

"Why? How are you better than I am? In which way is Peg superior to me?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Barnes, I have claimed no superiority. I simply state that I do not consent to your proposal."

The Colonel's quiet tones helped Barnes to control himself. He was not so much in love with Peggy that he did not see the true issues of the case. If he married her *without* the Colonel's consent he would gain very

little advantage by the marriage. He might boast as much as he liked, but he would continue to be an outsider, and he would never have such another chance to get a foothold into what he termed "an aristocratic family."

"Look here, Colonel," he cried eagerly, "I hope I understand a gentleman's feelings. You've only been home a week, and this has come upon you a bit sudden like. I'm in no such hurry as all that. I'm willing to let the matter stand over for a bit. Say a year, and if at the end of that time we are both of the same mind, will you consent then? There, you can't say that isn't fair."

For a moment the Colonel was tempted. Could he not settle the matter on these lines? Could he not insist on a two years' probation, during which time the two were not to meet, or correspond in any way? He felt sure that by the end of that time Peggy would have gotten over her infatuation, and the whole thing would die a natural death.

He was almost on the point of making such a suggestion, when he gave Barnes another look-over. No, he could not. In spite of the fellow's good looks, and fine physique, he was a vulgar, ill-bred, common bounder. He could not temporize with him. Besides, the Colonel had throughout all the years of his responsible life held to the rule that delay and temporization were a sign of weakness. It only meant the postponement of an evil day, and was an unworthy method for a strong man. "Let's get the thing settled, and out of the way once for all," he had said again and again concerning awkward things which had cropped up in the pathway of his life. Indeed, this had become a fixed principle of his life.

That was why, although it might seem sound policy to play for time just now, he could not do it. It would not be honourable. Neither in two nor in twenty years could he see himself consenting to any kind of intimacy

CHAPTER XI

UNACCEPTABLE ADVICE

WHILE Mr. James Barnes was making his way towards the station, Eleanor Trelawney was climbing the hill which led from the station to her father's house. Usually calm and cold, the girl was much excited. During the day she had had conversation with Miss Tamsin Cory, and one or two others of the same ilk, and afterwards had taken a step which was destined to prove very important in her life's history. She had often boasted to herself that she seldom acted on impulse, but submitted everything to the cold test of reason; but it might appear just at present that she was untrue to this boast. Even as she walked across the Heath her lips were tremulous while in her eyes was a look which suggested apprehension, if not fear.

"Miss Trelawney."

She gave a start as if caught in some guilty act, but a moment later a look of relief passed across her face.

"I saw you leaving the station and took the liberty of following you. You don't mind, do you?"

It was Roderick Ravenscroft who spoke, and from the earnest look he gave her it might appear that he had something important in his mind.

"The Heath is not private property," was her laughing reply.

"No, thank goodness! Are you on your way home?"

"I suppose so."

"Does that mean that you are in no hurry? Well, *why should* you be? It's a beautiful evening, and spring

is showing everywhere. Will you let me walk with you?"

Eleanor assented, almost eagerly. There was a kind of calm strength in Ravenscroft's presence, and although she had more than once spoken of him as "awfully conventional," she rather admired him. Indeed, although she had never confessed it, even to herself, she had more than an ordinary interest in him.

Instead of going straight towards her home, they turned into a path which led to the less frequented parts of the Heath.

"I hope you are all right at home, Miss Trelawney," said Ravenscroft rather awkwardly, after they had gone a few steps together.

"I don't think any one's there except Mother," was her answer. "I don't know where Peg is, and Father and John left the house early this morning."

"Yes, of course your father'll be at the War Office. As you know, I met him for the first time on Sunday, and—and—I say, you must be awfully proud of him!"

"Why?"

"Why? I think he's one of the grandest men I ever met. Just the perfect specimen of an English officer, who is also an English gentleman."

"I thought you seemed very much struck by him."

"I was. It isn't often one meets such a man. If I'd remained in the army I'd have given anything to serve under him. By Jove, he's the kind of man for whom his men will go anywhere, or do anything. I've been hearing to-day of his work in the East, and how by his coolness, his courage, and his iron will he's carried through some terribly difficult jobs."

"Do you admire these 'iron willed' men?"

"Yes, when they are like he is. You see, he's so kind and reasonable and never expects or asks for anything but what is right."

Eleanor was silent.

"He's always so courteous, too. I couldn't help noticing it on Sunday. No matter how much he abominated Miss Cory's views—and I'm positive he *did*—he seemed always to remember that she was a guest in his house."

Eleanor grew slightly angry at this. She remembered the conversation that took place, afterwards.

"Do you know," went on Ravenscroft, "that I almost dreaded meeting him. I had something to say to him, and I dreaded how he would meet me."

"And did you say what you wanted to say?"

"Yes," replied Ravenscroft, flushing somewhat. "Shall I tell you what it was?"

"And did he meet you kindly?" she asked, taking no notice of his question.

"Very kindly. Miss Trelawney, may I ask you something?"

"I can't keep you from asking anything you like, can I?" and she felt her heart beating rapidly.

"It's this," said Ravenscroft. "Of course it's an awful liberty for me to take, but I hope you won't mind. You don't agree with that woman, do you?"

"What woman?"

"Miss Cory. Of course, I know such people exist, and that such views as she holds are becoming very common, but I do hope that—that you hate them. Indeed," he went on hurriedly, "I was rather surprised to see her there as your friend. I know it's awfully cheeky on my part to say so, but I can't help it."

"And supposing I do?"

"Oh, but you couldn't, you know. No lady could."

Ravenscroft had said more than he intended. He was much excited at being alone with Eleanor, and in his excitement forgot himself. He knew that Miss Cory had been at the Trelawney home as Eleanor's friend, and

could not quite understand it, and yet he felt he had no right, much as he desired it, to condemn such a friendship.

"Then you do not class Miss Cory as a lady?"

"Who could?"

"I could, and do!"

"I'm awfully sorry."

"I don't see what you've to be sorry about. My friendships are rather a personal matter, and I fail to see why any—any"—she hesitated for a word—"outsider should interfere."

"Miss Trelawney," said Ravenscroft eagerly, "I didn't mean to say this, and yet I'm sure you must know. I hope I'm not an outsider as far as your house is concerned. I—I very much want to—to become one of you. You must surely know that. That's why that woman made me a bit angry. Had she been in some other house or some one else's friend, I shouldn't have given her a second thought,—except to laugh at her."

Ravenscroft was rather unfortunate in his remarks. But he was excited. He was not quite sure of his ground with Eleanor, and yet he was angry at the thought of her being the friend of such a woman as Tamsin Cory.

"Laugh at her, indeed!" Eleanor was irritated by his words, although much that he said pleased her. "*You* laugh at Tamsin Cory! Why, she's one of the most intellectual women I know."

"I'm sorry you know her at all," interjected Ravenscroft, making another unpolitic move.

"I fail to see why," replied his companion coldly. "Indeed, I do not understand what you have to do with my friendships. Aren't you taking a great deal upon yourself?"

"I'm afraid I am," admitted Ravenscroft. "But surely you know why. I'm so—so interested in you that I hate to see you in the society of such a woman. Surely

you don't agree with her, surely you don't accept her ideas about—about morality. They are not decent, you know."

"Really, Mr. Ravenscroft, I've no recollection of ever giving you permission to discuss my closest friends with me. As to what views I hold—I rather think that is purely a personal matter."

"I know I'm awfully rude," persisted Ravenscroft, "and I can't forgive myself for angering you. But—but—I say, Miss Trelawney, have I made a mistake? I—I,"—he was tremendously excited,—"I had hoped, sincerely hoped, passionately hoped that, although our acquaintance has not been a very long one, you cared enough for me to allow me to speak freely about such things."

"Such things as what?"

"Such things as—as friendships," replied Ravenscroft, vainly trying to lead the conversation into the channel he desired.

"Then I'm afraid you *have* made a mistake," replied Eleanor coldly. "I should never think of allowing any one—*any one*—to interfere with my friendships, to say nothing of—of a casual visitor to my father's house."

"But surely," said Ravenscroft, still floundering, "your father does not favour your—your intimacy with —that woman?"

"I beg your pardon, but I refuse to discuss my father's wishes."

"I'm sure I apologize," said Roderick, who was also getting a little angry; "no doubt I have been very foolish —perhaps presumptuous."

Still he was in love with this girl, and he felt sure that it was owing to his own clumsiness that the conversation had been so unsatisfactory. He did not believe—could not—that Eleanor could really care for a woman he felt to be vulgar, if not immoral. Perhaps in a thoughtless

moment she had invited her to her father's house, but he did not believe Eleanor was really influenced by her. Of course, he knew she held somewhat advanced views, but so did lots of other girls he knew, and he was so much in love with her that he had not paid them serious attention.

He determined he would make one more try, and again he took the wrong course.

"Miss Trelawney," he said, after they had walked some distance in silence, "I'm sure you can't mean it."

"Mean what?"

"What you said."

"What did I say?"

"That Miss Cory was your dearest friend."

"But I *do* say it. She *is* my dearest friend."

"And do you believe as she believes?"

"About what?"

"Why, all that wild talk about women, and marriage."

"I don't blindly follow any one. But in the main, I agree with her. Personally I hate the thought of marriage. How any self-respecting woman can consent to become the chattel of a man, to give her life to a man, is beyond me. The whole thought is disgusting."

Eleanor had said more than she meant, far more than she believed. But she did not have her usual control over herself. The decision she had made that day affected her more than she had realized. In her heart of hearts, Eleanor knew that her father was right, and yet so much had she been influenced by the people with whom she had met, that she determined to fight her battle to the last. After listening much to a certain class of women she half believed in what they said, and so fully had she accepted their views about what they called "women's inalienable right to liberty," that it had become a sort of passion with her.

In a sense, only a part of the girl's nature was aroused.

On the intellectual side, she was fully developed, but she had not realized her womanhood. As a child she had never been fond of dolls, and had never been fully conscious of what, for want of a better word, may be termed the maternal side of her nature. Like many girls of her age, she was somewhat of a revolutionist by nature, and owing to a lack of strong guiding influences in her home life, and moved to admiration of what she called the unconventionality of the women she had met, she was unbalanced.

Added to all this was the fact that religious influences had been largely eliminated. The advanced women she had met spoke of religion "as an unnatural restriction of human liberty," and this fact had determined her to oppose her father if he should attempt to use parental authority.

She was not what might be called an affectionate girl, and yet in a way she could not understand, she hungered for affection. She professed to scorn marriage, and yet, in spite of the fact that she was angry with Peggy for her infatuation for Barnes, she aided and abetted her in her disobedience to her father, and although she despised Barnes, she almost envied her sister.

"You are serious in this, Miss Trelawney?" asked Ravenscroft after a somewhat painful silence.

"Perfectly serious."

"Then I *am* mistaken. Please forgive me. Had I known that, I would not, of course, have bothered you. Neither will I tell you, what—what I longed to tell you. You would not understand. It—it would have been too —too *sacred* for you to comprehend. My eyes are opened now—and—and, of course, I'm—tremendously sorry."

After that they talked on the merest commonplaces until they reached Colonel Trelawney's house.

"Won't you come in and speak to Mother?" she asked.

"No, thank you. It's nearly dinner-time, and my people will be expecting me. Good-evening."

Eleanor Trelawney went straight into her own room, nervous, irritable, and low spirited. She could not understand she was disappointed, angry with herself. She had been true to what she called her convictions, but she was not satisfied. She felt sure she knew what Rod Ravenscroft had meant to say to her, and the thought brought a feeling to her heart akin to pain. There was something else, too, something wonderful, indefinable. Then her mind flew back to the experiences of the previous Sunday night, and her father's imperative command that she should see no more of such women as Tamsin Cory. She remembered, too, what she had done that day, and wondered if she had done right.

Yes, she did admire her father, and in her heart of hearts she knew that he was only doing what was right. After all, she herself had often felt uncomfortable at the talk of the advanced women. Perhaps had Colonel Trelawney come into the room at that moment Eleanor's life's story might have been different. In a way she could not understand, she longed for affection, longed for loving advice, and guidance.

Did Rod Ravenscroft care for her? Was that what he meant? Her heart beat faster at the thought. And yet, no! She hated the idea of marriage, and she would be free to live her own life, no matter what her father might say.

Dinner was to be late that evening. Colonel Trelawney had 'phoned that he could not get home till after eight o'clock, and she found herself dressed and ready before the bell rang.

"Peg, where have you been?" she asked as she heard her sister's footsteps outside the door.

"I'll tell you after dinner. There, his Serene Highness has arrived. He's talking with the pattern boy."

Eleanor was quite calm as presently she met the family at dinner, and as her father seemed very cold and stern, the influences of the day seemed to harden.

"I'm going to spend to-morrow with Trev," remarked the Colonel presently. "He has to go to Ireland on Friday, so I must leave London to-night. I want to get to Plymouth early, so that I can have the whole day with him."

"When will you get back, dear?" asked Mrs. Trelawney.

"I shall leave Plymouth on Friday," was his reply. "But I have to see some men at the War Office directly I get back."

"Fancy, two whole nights!" sighed Mrs. Trelawney.

"Yes, two whole nights," laughed the Colonel. "But that's not much after several years' absence."

"I hate your going away, though. I don't think the War Office is fair. You ought to have had at least a month's freedom after all you've done."

"I shall soon get it now," replied the Colonel. "Of course, there were a lot of things that had to be settled, but I'm nearly through with them. And, of course, I have to see Trev."

"Couldn't I go with you?" asked Mrs. Trelawney. "I want to see him too."

The Colonel was on the point of answering in the affirmative, but at that moment he saw the look in Peggy's eyes.

"I wish I could say 'yes,'" he replied, "but I think you'll have to stay home. However pleasant it might be, it wouldn't be wise."

"Do you think the house would run away if Mother weren't here?" asked Eleanor.

"I think it will be safer if she is here to take care of

it," replied the Colonel gravely. "And that reminds me. Of course you remember our conversation on Sunday night?"

"We are not likely to forget it," replied the girl.

"Just so. I've had rather an unpleasant reminder of it this evening. As I shall have to be leaving shortly, I want to say that I trust to your honour to see that my wishes are obeyed."

"Whose honour?" asked Peggy.

"The honour of both you girls. The decision I came to on Sunday has been confirmed, especially to-day."

"You mean that I'm not to see Jim?"

"You are not to see that man Barnes. Neither are you to hold any communication with him whatever."

Peggy was silent.

"I must confess to a grievous disappointment," went on the Colonel. "In spite of what I said on Sunday, I find that you have been again meeting this man."

"Yes, and I mean to," was the defiant reply.

"Then you know that he asked for an interview with me?"

"Yes. I never promised I wouldn't see him. I'm engaged to him, and of course I told him all you said."

"You realize that this is open defiance and disobedience?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, I've seen him, and I've forbidden him to speak to you, or see you again. If he disobeys me, I shall have to take stern methods. I'm sorry to have to say this; but you have compelled me."

"And does this also apply to *my* friends?" asked Eleanor.

"To those of the Miss Cory order, yes," was the father's reply. "As for such friends as your mother approves of, I will gladly welcome them. Come now, children, you *may think* me hard; but you'll thank me

some day. I'm only acting in love, and for your good."

Perhaps his closing words were not wise. If there is anything which present-day girls resent it is to be told that something is being done for their good.

In any case neither of them replied, and as the Colonel had to leave them in order to make preparations for his journey they went away together.

"John, my boy," confided the Colonel just before his departure, "I feel anything but happy in going away. Nothing would have induced me to leave home just now, but the fact that I shall have no other opportunity of seeing Trev for some weeks."

He had told John of what had passed between Barnes and himself, and had expressed a stronger dislike to him than before.

"Yes, it is awkward," assented John.

"However, the thing was bound to come to a head," went on the Colonel, "and one can't live in a state of uncertainty. We can either trust them, or we can't."

John was silent.

"Anyhow I shall be staying at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel. You must telephone me if anything happens."

"All right, Dad."

"And—and you'll do all you can, my boy."

"Yes,—all I can."

"That's right, my son. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dad. Come back as soon as you can."

"He's a good lad," reflected the Colonel, as the Cornish express swept westward. "Thank God for him."

CHAPTER XII

TREVOR TRELAWNEY

ON the whole Colonel Trelawney was pleased with his son Trevor. He found him to be a tall, handsome young fellow, gentlemanly in appearance, and a smart officer. His Commanding Officer, while not enthusiastic, spoke well of him, and expressed the opinion that he might settle down to a capable, reliable man. He had borne the rank of captain during the war, but after the Armistice, he, with thousands of others, had been reduced in rank. The Commanding Officer hinted that he was inclined to take things easy, and was rather extravagant, although in this respect he was no worse than many others.

Father and son had spent the day together, and the Colonel had been introduced to most of Trev's fellow-officers. Years before, the Colonel had been stationed in Plymouth, and it was a great delight to him to visit the scenes among which he had lived during a part of his early manhood. He had thrown off the anxious thoughts which had beset him during the last few days and became quite gay.

Trevor was very proud of his father. He found that the Colonel was regarded as a very big man, and more than once he heard it hinted that it was quite on the carpet that he would soon be General. Still he did not feel quite at ease in his society. There was something which he did not quite understand. It was true he was genial and kindly, but his every word and gesture convinced his son that he was a man who looked on anything like delinquency with a grave eye.

"I'm sorry you have to go to Ireland to-morrow," re-

marked the Colonel as the two sat in the dining-room of the hotel.

"Yes, it's a bit of a nuisance," assented Trevor. "I have to go to a most ungodly hole, too. There are no decent people living in the district, and so everything like social amenities will be cut off."

"That's natural," replied the Colonel. "No soldier who goes to Ireland in these days can have an easy time. The country is practically in a state of revolution."

"Still I hope I shall get a bit of hunting."

"I should judge not, if what I hear is true."

"I shall have a good try, anyhow. But how to get a decent mount will be a difficult question. I shan't be able to take my own horse with me."

"Your own horse?" queried the Colonel.

"Yes," replied Trevor somewhat uneasily. "I was obliged to get one, you know. I was frightfully lucky, too. A beautiful thing he is, just rising five, and hasn't a single vice. I got him dirt cheap, too. I only bought him two days ago; you see I had to decide rather in a hurry. If I hadn't bought him another fellow would, and I felt the bargain was too good to miss. You haven't got the bill, I suppose?"

"Haven't got the bill?"

"I told him to send it to you."

"Told who?"

"The fellow I bought it from."

"I don't understand."

"Of course I ought to have written. But as I told you, the horse was for sale dirt cheap, and half a dozen fellows wanted him. I've had an awful time. There's some very good hunting a few miles from here, and hiring horses has been bankruptcy. Besides, some of the things I've had to ride have been just bone-shakers—practically no good at all. That's why I bought this [illegible]."

"And you told the man from whom you bought it to send the bill to me?"

"Of course," remarked Trev, glad, as he remarked afterwards, that he'd "got the thing off his chest."

"And may I ask how much you gave for it?"

"Six hundred," replied the son. "The chap asked eight, but, of course, I wasn't going to have that. Still, horse-flesh is jolly dear."

"And you expect me to pay for it?"

"Of course," replied Trev coolly.

"Then let me tell you at once, my boy, that I can't afford to do so."

"But, sir—that's ridiculous."

"It's a fact, anyhow."

"But I can't get out of it, and of course a fellow must have a horse."

"Must he? Well, I didn't when I was your age. And what was more, I lived on my pay."

"Of course that's impossible."

"No, not impossible, although it was very hard. In these days, now that the pay is so much better, it can be done quite comfortably."

"Comfortably! Why, it doesn't pay one's wine bills!"

"Indeed. That must be very awkward for you."

"Jolly awkward, I can assure you. But for the mater I should have been in a bad way. Even as it is——" Trev hesitated at this point.

"Yes," said the Colonel quietly, "even as it is——?"

"Well, you see, Father," replied Trevor, who was very nervous although he tried to speak carelessly, "army pay is a mere bagatelle, and no fellow of any position can afford to live on it."

"Indeed, I thought it very good, especially when it is compared to that which I received as a lieutenant. However, you say your *mother* helped you."

"Yes, she did. I—I couldn't have done without it."

"Trev, my boy," said the Colonel, "do you realize that you have made things very hard for your mother?"

"How can that be? Of course I know you are well off."

"I'm not badly off, although anything but a rich man. When I left home I thought I had arranged liberally for all expenses, but as you know the cost of everything has more than doubled. That was why your mother found it hard to send you money, and why she couldn't send John on to the 'Varsity. In fact the boy went to work in order to keep things going."

"Of course I'm sorry," remarked Trev; "still Jack wouldn't mind. He's never so happy as when he's mucking about with engineering things. But about those bills of mine?"

"What bills? You mean that for the horse?"

"Yes, that and other things. The truth is I'm jolly hard up, and the man at Cox's wasn't at all decent."

"Do you mean that you are in debt?"

"Of course I am," and Trev coolly cut off the end of an expensive cigar. "You see," he went on, "a man must live like a gentleman, and you can't get a decent bottle of champagne for less than——"

"Champagne!" interrupted the Colonel. "Do subalterns buy champagne?"

"When they belong to the set I'm in."

Whatever the Colonel might have said was cut short by the appearance of a porter behind his chair.

"Colonel Trelawney, sir?"

"Yes."

"You are wanted on the telephone, sir. This way, please."

The Colonel followed the man to the telephone booth.

"Yes, who is it?" he called.

"*It's* I—John," was the reply.

"Yes, my boy. Is anything the matter?"

"Do you think you could catch the midnight train home to-night, Dad? I wish you could."

"The midnight train home!"

"Yes. I think you ought to be here."

"Why? Is anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid there's a lot wrong. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes. Go on, tell me quickly."

"It's Eleanor and Peg."

"Yes, what of them?"

"They went out directly you had left last night, and didn't come home till the early hours of the morning. Unfortunately I had to be at the works early this morning. I've—I've something rather important on there. When I got home this evening, I found they'd been out all day. They haven't come home yet."

"And your mother?" asked the Colonel.

"She's terribly bothered," replied the boy. "You see——"

"Perhaps there's nothing serious," interrupted the Colonel. "From what your mother says they've often done that kind of thing."

"Yes, I know, but Mother had to go out for an hour or so this afternoon, and when she got back, she went to their rooms, and she says that nearly all their things are gone."

"Their things?"

"Yes, their clothes, and that sort of thing."

"And what do you think?"

"I hardly know what to think, but I'm afraid they've left home."

"You mean for good?"

"That's what I fear."

"And have you done anything?"

"Yes, sir. First of all I went to Camden Town, where that fellow Barnes' people live."

"Well?"

"It was a bit awkward. I hardly knew what to say to them, or how to ask questions. But I felt sure they knew something."

"Did they tell you anything?"

"No, I could get nothing definite, but I feel certain they knew that Peg had left home. They are a funny lot, but they would tell me nothing. I did my best, sir, and I don't think I gave myself away. Then I tried to find out about Eleanor."

"About Eleanor—yes."

"I went to that club where the woman Cory is a member, but she wasn't there, and no one seemed to know when she was likely to turn up. Just as I was leaving, however, she came to the club, and I asked her pointblank if she'd seen my sister?"

"And had she?"

"She wouldn't tell me. But I'm sure she had. I asked her a lot of questions which she tried to evade, and that's as far as I've got. I thought you ought to know. I'm sorry if I've made a mess of it."

"I'm sure you've done everything you could do, my boy. Have you told your mother?"

"Yes, sir, I've told her everything. She's all right, but she badly wants you. Of course you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Tell her I'll catch the midnight train. Comfort her all you can, my boy."

"Yes, sir. Don't worry. We'll manage somehow."

When the Colonel hung up the receiver, he stood for a minute like a man stunned.

Then a great wave of pity passed over him. Little Peggy, the child he had romped and played with; the happy, turbulent, wilful, yet loving little thing he had so often put to bed, to run away from home for the sake of a fellow like that! No, no, it couldn't be true!

And yet how could her disappearance be explained?

Why had both the girls taken their belongings? They must have determined on this for some time. . . .

Had he done right? Had he made sufficient allowance for the new spirit of the age? Ought he not to have been less firm, more gentle, more lenient with them? Mightn't things have turned out better if he had let them drift with the tide?

But no; that was impossible. He would have been violating everything sacred and true if he had countenanced what he felt to be wrong, fatally and inherently wrong. Even although the attitude he had adopted had ended so disastrously, he could not repent of it.

"Poor little Alice!" he said aloud, and tears came to his eyes, and a sob to his throat as the words escaped him. "It will break her heart. But no, it can't be true, and John will do all that's possible while I am away. Anyhow, thank God for John. He's a fine lad."

The thought of John made him remember that his eldest son was waiting for him. Yes, they had been discussing Trevor's extravagant ideas when he had been called to the 'phone. What a difference in the two boys!

"You've been a long time away, sir," remarked Trev on his return; "nothing the matter, I hope?"

The Colonel did not reply. He would have liked to have taken his eldest son into his confidence; but he felt he could not. Perhaps their conversation during dinner had not been of a nature to inspire confidence.

"I find it is necessary for me to go home to-night," he said presently. "There are matters in London that require immediate attention."

"Oh, is that all?" remarked Trev. "But your train won't start for another hour, and I would like to settle up these money matters before you go. I wish you could let me have a fairly fat check."

"What do you mean by a fat check?"

"A thousand would *put* me quite straight," replied

Trev. "I could then pay the fellow for the horse, and settle up a few other things. It wouldn't leave me much, but at any rate I should owe nothing."

"Trev," remarked the Colonel, "do you realize what you are saying?"

"I think I do, sir," replied the son with an uneasy laugh.

"I have my doubts about it. Your mother has given me an idea of what she has already advanced you, and now you coolly ask for a thousand pounds. Do you know that up to now you have cost me more than all the others put together? Is that fair?"

"Do you think that's the right way to put it, sir?"

"I know of no other way to put it. Do you know your extravagance has robbed John of the chance of going to Oxford—that in order to keep you, he has had to work in a motor engineer's shop? Look at the matter squarely. I am anything but a rich man, but what I have I hope to divide equally among my children. If I were to give you a check for a thousand pounds as you desire, I should simply rob from the others by that amount. Would that be fair?"

Trev was silent.

"What you ask is simply impossible," went on the Colonel.

"Impossible, sir?"

"Impossible. I can't spare the money."

Trev muttered something about the "absurdity of such a statement."

"The truth is, my son, I can just afford you an allowance of one hundred and fifty pounds a year—no more. You must make that do. Thousands of fellows in your position have only their pay to live on, and they do with it. You will have to get rid of your silly, extravagant notions."

"*That* kind of talk simply drives a fellow to borrow

from his tailors or from the money lenders," remarked the son.

"Of course if a fellow hasn't decent pride, that is the kind of thing he *would* do," retorted the Colonel. "Anyhow, that's the position."

"But what am I to do? These people to whom I owe money are constantly dunning me. Besides, what about the horse?"

"I don't want to be unreasonable," said the Colonel, "although I confess to being a bit worried. Do you know that your brother lives on the wages he earns and won't take a penny more?"

"Oh, I'm sick of hearing about him," snapped Trev. "Mother used to be always telling me what the pattern boy did. Besides, he's cast in that mould. He was always contented to be a day labourer, but if a man has the tastes of a gentleman, he must pay for them."

"Certainly, if he can," replied the father tartly. "But in my opinion, a gentleman, whatever his tastes, should live within his means. I am awfully sorry to have to talk like this on our first day together, but it is always well to get a right understanding. This is what I am prepared to do. If you will send me these bills you owe, I will see what can be done with them."

"Awfully decent of you, I'm sure, sir. Of course that includes the horse?" and Trev spoke eagerly.

"No," was the reply. "You can't afford to keep a horse."

"But—but—I say, sir——"

When Trev left his father half an hour later, he was much subdued. "I had no idea he would take it like that," he reflected. "Dash it, he doesn't give a man a chance. And the worst of it is, he knows the ropes so thoroughly that he's always putting one in the wrong."

As for the Colonel, he made his way to Millbay Station with a sad heart. The day, to which he had looked

forward so eagerly, was ending in gloom. His conversation with his eldest soon had been anything but satisfactory.

But it was not Trev who was his chief trouble just now. After all, the question of money might be met, but how could he deal with the horror which John's message had called up?

All through the night he tried to fasten upon some plan of action, but he seemed to be met with a "no thoroughfare" on every road he took. He was not so much troubled about Eleanor as about Peggy. He believed that John had been right in his summing up of Eleanor's character, and that she was not likely to come to any irrevocable harm. She was cold, calculating, and not easily moved by sudden influences; but Peggy was different. She was younger, she was passionate and wilful, and she was careless about consequences.

"How can I save her?" he asked himself again and again, "how can I make her see that she's ruining her life?"

He might be too late even now. His child might have taken steps that would be fatal.

"God help me!" he prayed again and again, "help me to save my little maid."

At length the train swept into the London terminus, and he had just signalled a taxi-driver when he felt a touch on his arm.

"John!" cried the Colonel. "This is good of you. Is—is there anything new?"

"Not much," replied John, "but I thought you wouldn't mind my coming to meet you."

CHAPTER XIII

THE GIRLS TAKE FRENCH LEAVE

IN spite of everything the Colonel could not help feeling comforted. The thought that his youngest boy should get out of his bed at five o'clock in the morning so that he might be at Paddington to meet him at six helped him to bear his trouble. He was not an emotional man under ordinary circumstances, but he was touched by this act of kindness.

"If all of them were like him," he reflected, "what a joy life would be."

"Get in, my boy," he said as he stood by the door of the taxi.

"After you, Dad. I say it was beastly of me to ring you up like that, but I thought it was best."

"Of course it was best. And you have heard nothing since?"

They were sitting side by side now, and the conveyance was leaving the station.

"No, I've heard nothing. I think Mother has, though."

"Why do you think so?"

"I saw her reading something which I thought she did not wish me to see. But I'm sure of nothing."

"Have you seen your mother this morning?"

"Yes, Dad. I was hoping I'd get away without her knowing; but she heard me dressing, and called me to her. I'm afraid she didn't sleep last night. She asked me if I was coming to meet you."

"But she said nothing particular?"

"She only told me to hurry back. She *is* plucky."

"Of course she is. But why do you say so now?"

"She told me to tell you not to bother about her, for she would be all right."

The Colonel sat in silence.

"I say, Dad, I'm awfully sorry for you," said John.

"That's good of you. Perhaps after all it may not be so bad as we fear."

"Let's hope not," was the boy's reply, after which nothing more was said until they reached home.

No sooner had the Colonel passed through the door than he saw his wife. Evidently John was right when he said that she had passed a sleepless night. Her face was pale and worn, while her eyes were swollen. She did not speak at her husband's appearance, but rushed to him, and began to sob convulsively.

"It's good of you to be up to meet me," and the Colonel tried to speak cheerfully. "There, there, my little wife, you see I've got back safe and sound."

"Wait a minute," she whispered. "I shall be better directly. There," and she wiped her eyes vigorously, "I'm all right now. Come and get some breakfast. You must be tired and hungry. Everything is ready. I saw to it myself. No, we are not going to discuss anything till you've done justice to the kidneys and bacon. You saw Trev. How's he looking? John, be careful about the coffee; it's very hot."

Evidently she had made up her mind to be cheerful, and although her heart was heavy, she seemed bent on making her husband's home-coming glad. Indeed, she revealed herself in a new light. Dearly as the Colonel loved her, he could not help owning to himself that she was doubtless weak, and easily overruled by the stronger will of her children, but now he felt that for the time they had changed places. It was she who sought to drive away gloomy thoughts; it was she who tried to make him think of pleasant things.

"No," she said after they had finished breakfast, "you must not bother your head about me. Besides, I can perhaps help you more than you think. Anyhow, it's not me that you must trouble about. I shall be strong enough to bear everything."

"What do you mean by that, Alice?" asked the Colonel.

"Shall I leave you?" asked John as he saw his mother hesitate.

"No, my dear," she replied. "You don't want to keep anything from him, do you?" turning to her husband.

"Certainly not," replied the Colonel. "And by the way, my boy, do you think you could be spared from the works to-day?"

"I had thought of that, Dad, and I'm sure I could. The truth is there is something I wanted to tell you. I—I asked Mr. Davenport yesterday if he could let me have a little slack time."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort, but you had so many things to think about that I did not want to bother you with my jobs. Besides, there's no hurry. Everything's going A1."

"That's right; but you have something to tell me, Alice. What is it?"

"It's not much, and—and I hope you won't misunderstand. But Eleanor has sent me a letter. It came by the late post last night."

"Let me see it, please."

"I hate giving it to you. But please, please, my darling, don't think I agree with her. I was thinking about it in bed last night. I imagined from what you said just before you left for Plymouth that I thought you a little hard and unreasonable with the girls. I don't. I don't see how you could have been kinder, or more considerate. I wanted to tell *you that before* showing you her letter.

I'm afraid it's my fault, too. I ought to have kept a firmer hand on them years ago. I ought to have taught them differently."

She passed him a letter as she spoke, which the Colonel opened with an anxious look in his eyes.

"DEAR MOTHER" (he read),

"You will have guessed from the fact that our things are gone that I have decided to leave Hampstead. The truth is I object to being treated as a child, and to have my life interfered with as though I had no personality of my own. I don't suppose you will be greatly shocked or surprised, as I've told you pretty plainly what I meant to do. In a way I'm sorry to leave you, but it will be a relief to get away from a place where the man who calls himself my father now rules. It was bad enough before he came, it is unbearable now. I hesitated some time before taking this step, and considered the advisability of staying at Hampstead and treating his petty and absurd restrictions with utter indifference.

"But I have decided differently. I should be bored to tears with constant bickerings and quarrels. Besides, his attitude is a continual irritation. Not only do I cordially detest him, but his evident belief that he has the right to interfere with my life, and to say whom I shall have for my friends, is a bit too much. That is why I am going to think my own thoughts, live my own life, and earn my own living. Colonel Trelawney may be able to command a number of slaves in a barrack yard, but his belief that he has the right to command *me*, is too absurd for words.

"It will be no use your trying to find out where I am. Neither need you imagine that I shall come back like a prodigal child to ask forgiveness. I know how to take care of myself, and in any case I would rather die than be obedient to a petty tyrant whose ideas surely had their birth in the Ark. So don't expect to see me again.

"ELEANOR."

The Colonel read this epistle through very carefully, and then after looking very grave for some time went through it a second time.

"John has not seen this?" he asked, turning to his wife.

Mrs. Trelawney shook her head.

"Read it, John," and he passed it to his son.

John read it through, but made no remark.

"What do you think of it, my boy?"

"There's not much to think about, is there?" remarked John. "I've heard her say all this dozens of times in different ways until I'm about tired of it."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes, except that Eleanor is a little more considerate than lots of other girls I've heard of. You remember I told you about some girls I met at a dance. They informed me that they hadn't said anything to their people about what *they* had done. They just left their homes and left their people to think what they liked. Eleanor *has* had the decency to write to Mother."

"Call it decency, do you?" remarked the Colonel.

"Please don't mistake me, Dad. The whole thing is horrible according to my idea, but there we are. I simply say that Eleanor's no worse than thousands of other girls, and better than some. She *did* have the common decency to write to Mother."

"It's a shameful letter," said Mrs. Trelawney. "I could never have believed it if I hadn't seen it. To talk of her father like that!"

"She's never said a word about Peggy," remarked the Colonel presently.

"No, but I've no doubt she knows where Peg is," said John.

"Why do you think so?"

"Of course they've been hand-in-glove in this. Besides, didn't you notice the beginning of her letter? 'You will have guessed from the fact that *our* things are gone.' Of course they went away together."

"Do you imagine *they* are together now?"

"Depends upon Barnes," replied John.

"You have Barnes' address, haven't you?"

"Yes. Here it is. Dad, I'm not disposed to take such a hopeless view of things as I did."

"Why?"

"Because whatever else Eleanor is, she's got brains, and she's as cold as an icicle. She'll not allow Peg to make too much of a fool of herself. In her way she's fond of the kid, too."

"Then you think if we can find out where Eleanor is, we shall find Peg at the same time?"

"I don't say that. Still I'm sure she'll see to it that Barnes does the straight thing, in so far as such a fellow *can* do the straight thing."

"Perhaps you are right. Let's hope so anyhow. Will you ring for a taxi? We'll go and see the Barnes family again."

"Oh, I *am* glad you are back," cried Mrs. Trelawney when John had left them, "and I'm sure you have done right. At first I was afraid lest you had been hard on them, and that perhaps you had not made enough allowance for the topsy-turvy way in which everything is looked at. But I'm not troubling half so much now."

"I'm glad of that, Alice."

"Lester, you've done right. I know I've been weak, and yielding, but I can see now that it needed a strong hand like yours. To have let them go on in the way they were going was ruinous. Even if you can't find them, I shall still know that you did right."

The Colonel looked grave.

"I know how you feel," went on Mrs. Trelawney. "You are thinking most of Peg. You are afraid you'll not be able to save her from that man. But even if you can't, it'll be all right in the end."

"If I can't save her from him I don't know how anything can be right," remarked the Colonel gloomily.

"Yes, I know the thought is dreadful, but, my dear husband, I'm old-fashioned enough to believe in God. I may have been a foolish mother, but I've tried to do right. And more than that, this home has been a Christian home. Both you and I taught our children to pray. We taught them to believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, and that will not be in vain. Let's never forget that."

"No, Alice, we will not forget that," replied the Colonel. "Thank you for reminding me. I was in danger of forgetting it."

"I know they seem utterly irreligious now, I know they've been carried away by the spirit of the age. They've forgotten God, and His commandments. They've forgotten filial love, and duty, but I can never believe that our prayers and our example will be in vain. They'll feel their need of us, some day. But I *do* hope you'll find them, and bring them home."

"It may be they will refuse, even if I *do* find them," said the Colonel, "but I'll do everything in my power."

"And we have John," went on Mrs. Trelawney.

"Yes. He's a great fellow, Alice."

"I only wish Trev were more—oh, you've told me nothing about Trev. Is he all right? What did you think of him?"

"Taxi will be here in a quarter of an hour," informed John entering the room.

"That's right," said the Colonel almost cheerfully. His wife's words had lifted the gloom somewhat, her simple faith had made him feel almost hopeful.

"By the way, John," he went on, "you said you had something to tell me. What is it?"

"I'm afraid it would bother you now, sir. You will be anxious about other things."

"It wouldn't bother me a bit, my boy. I've made all the plans I can about this business, and I want to know what you have in *your mind*. I'm interested in all you

do, and as I told you several days ago, I want you to remember that everything in your life is of interest to me. So speak freely, my dear lad."

He felt very tenderly towards his son just then. His heart had gone out to the lad from the first, and he saw in him a son in whom he could rejoice. But there was more than that now. John had shown himself so thoughtful, so clear headed, so eager to help him, and with such good feeling that he felt more than ever drawn towards him. Here at all events was a child after his own heart, and he helped to atone for the others.

"Of course it may all end in nothing," said John shyly, "very probably it will, but Mr. Davenport thinks a lot of it, and says it may revolutionize motor engineering. I've been years at it, sir."

"At what, my boy?"

"It's what I call an Automatic Gear Changer, sir. Of course it isn't complete yet, but I believe I've got the idea."

"An Automatic Gear Changer?" queried the Colonel.

"Yes." John's shyness had now gone. "I wish there were time for me to show you. It's down in the cellar. No one knows about it but Mr. Davenport and myself, and I wouldn't let him see it until I'd finished some of the parts. But he's been awfully kind, and tremendously keen. It's this way, sir. When I learnt to drive a car first, I was awfully bothered with gear changing. It seemed such a nuisance every time the thing had to go up hill to be obliged to change the gear. It seemed so clumsy, too. First you have to jam down the clutch, and then you have to get your gear through a gate for your second or third or fourth speed. I was always a bit keen on mechanism and I thought how grand it would be if something could be invented whereby the gear would change itself automatically according to the burden on the engine."

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried the Colonel enthusiastically. "And do you think you have managed it, my boy?"

"I want to show you how far I've got," replied John. "The thing is down in the cellar. You see, I fixed up a workshop down there, and I've often been busy there of a night. I wanted to tell you about it before, but I hadn't got far enough. Yesterday, however, I had a chat with Mr. Davenport, and he was awfully kind to me."

"In what way?"

"He told me he thought a great deal of the idea, and as things were not so pressing just now, I might take a little more time at it. That is why he won't be surprised if I don't turn up to-day."

"Awfully good of Davenport," responded the Colonel, "and of course I'll have a look at it the first moment I can spare. I had no idea you had fixed up a workshop."

Little as the boy suspected it, he was helping his father greatly. The Colonel was troubled beyond words by what had taken place, and although he professed a greater interest in John's schemes than he really felt, the very fact that his boy confided in him, comforted him.

A few minutes later, they were on their way to Camden Town, in order to interview the Barnes family.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COLONEL VISITS CAMDEN TOWN

"THIS is the place, Dad."

The taxi drew up before a shabby house in a shabby street. In spite of the spring morning, the place looked dirty and comfortless.

The Colonel paid the driver, dismissed the cab, and knocked at the door. "It's just eight o'clock," he reflected, looking at his watch. "We ought to find every one home."

The door was opened by a shabby-genteel looking woman who was fast approaching fifty years of age. Thirty years before, she might have been a pretty girl of the doll-like and characterless type. Now she was faded, and untidy. Apparently she had left her breakfast to admit them. The clatter of teacups, as well as the sound of feminine voices was plainly to be heard in a room close by, while the smell of fried bacon pervaded the narrow passage. The Colonel noticed that the oilcloth on the floor was dirty, while the cheap hat stand had lost two of its pegs.

"Oh, it's you again, is it?" remarked the woman, looking at John.

"Yes, Mrs. Barnes," replied the boy. "This is my father."

"I hope you will excuse my calling so early, Mrs. Barnes," remarked the Colonel, "but I wanted to see your son. I thought if I came at this hour I might catch him before he went to business."

"My son isn't at home," replied Mrs. Barnes. "I [illegible]een him since yesterday morning."

She seemed rather awed by the Colonel's presence, although there was a look of lurking antagonism in her eyes.

"I'm sorry for that," replied the Colonel, "but perhaps you can give me a few minutes of your time."

John noticed that the chatter of voices in the back room had ceased. Doubtless there were eager listeners to the conversation.

"I'm afraid I'm rather busy this morning," remarked Mrs. Barnes. "My young ladies haven't gone to town yet, and—and we are without a servant just now."

"I'm so sorry," remarked the Colonel politely. "Servants are a difficult problem, aren't they? But perhaps you could spare me just five minutes."

Mrs. Barnes seemed rather in a dilemma. On the one hand she was evidently desirous to invite the Colonel to stay, but on the other she looked furtively around as though she were under orders.

At that moment, however, two girls came into the passage from the back room, and eagerly looked towards Mrs. Barnes.

"This is Colonel Trelawney, Edith, my dear. He's called to see Jim."

"Ask him into the drawing-room, Mother," replied Edith in her best manner. "Good-morning, Colonel Trelawney; this is indeed a pleasure."

"It's very kind of you to say so," replied the Colonel. "I'm afraid I'm taking an unpardonable liberty, but I wanted to see your brother particularly."

Edith was evidently dressed for her day's work. She was a rather well-formed girl, and knew the value of good clothes.

"You must excuse the disorder," remarked Miss Barnes as she opened the door of a stuffy apartment which she had designated the "drawing-room." "But as Mother *told you she, like* every one else, had servant diffi-

"Why didn't you tell him what you knew, then?" persisted the Colonel.

"Oh, no," tittered Edith, "you wouldn't expect us to spoil sport, would you? We're not *that* sort."

"I see very little sport in it," was the reply. "Your son knew that I objected very strongly to—to—this friendship."

"And what if you did? Surely it was your girl's affair. Besides, what is there to object to?"

Miss Barnes was doubtless angered by the Colonel's remark, and thought it best, as she told her mother afterwards, "to let him have it straight."

"To say the least of it," he replied. "You naturally knew that I should be interested in what my daughter proposed to do."

"Yes, and you insulted Jim on Wednesday," replied Emily, who had less control over herself than her sister. "Jim told us. He said you treated him as if he was dirt, and then told the servant to show him out of the club. Of course Jim wouldn't stand that. He's too much spirit. So he took his own line. Oh, I don't mince words! Jim's a gentleman, he is. He was an officer just as you are. You admitted him to your house on Sunday, and treated him like an equal, and then on Wednesday you talked to him as though he were a dog. We are as good as you are. Do you think we mind what you say? Of course we knew what was in Jim's mind when your son called yesterday: but we wouldn't tell him anything. If we had, he'd have tried to stop the wedding."

"It seems to me you don't know much," retorted the Colonel. He saw that the second Miss Barnes was in a passion, and would be likely to speak freely.

"Don't we?" snapped the girl. "But don't think I'm going to tell you. I'm not such a fool as that."

"*What is* there to tell?" persisted the Colonel.

"Now, Emily, mind what you are saying," warned Edith.

"I don't care a button what I say," retorted the girl. "It makes me sick when people treat us as inferiors. I can see what he wants plain enough. He's hoping that the wedding hasn't taken place, and if we tell him what Jim's plans are, he may be in time to stop it. But, catch me! *She's* not much of a catch, anyhow, but I hope Jim'll marry her if only to spite 'em:—come to think of it, though, I don't care whether he does or not."

"There now, Emily, we must go now, and no good ever comes of hard words," and Edith again smiled ingratiatingly at the Colonel. "Of course we don't know anything. Jim's a close one, he is; and goes his own way. Good-morning, Colonel. Of course you're just a little bit shocked, but like as anything it'll turn out all right. Good-morning, John. I hope we shall be good friends, and see a lot of each other. Won't you come to supper some night?"

A minute later the girls were in the street, but the Colonel and John still remained in the drawing-room. The drama was not played out yet.

"Now, Mother, mind you don't give yourself or Jim away," they heard one of the girls say on the door-step, and this made the Colonel hope for revelations.

"I'm sure I feel for you, sir," remarked Mrs. Barnes as she again entered the room. "I don't believe in these runaway marriages. What I say is, go to church, and do the thing in a Christian way. But there, what could Jim do? You didn't treat him fair, sir. I must say that. When he came home on Sunday night, he was as pleased as anything, and I'm sure my girls were hungering to take Peggy to their hearts as a sister. That was what made him so mad at the way you spoke to him on Wednesday."

"Then he told you what he intended to do on Wednesday night?" asked the Colonel.

"It's not for me to say what Jim said," was Mrs. Barnes' guarded reply.

"You see you don't give me a chance," remarked the Colonel.

"A chance for what?" asked the woman eagerly.

The Colonel was silent.

"Do you mean," she went on, "that you'd—you'd make the best of it, if they owned up?"

"Is that your idea, Mrs. Barnes?"

"Oh, I'm all for doing things in a lawful, proper way. My poor husband was a lawyer's clerk, and a regular stickler for law and order. You should see what a beautiful handwriting he wrote. Well, as I was saying, if only things could have come off in a proper way, how nice it would have been. The wedding could have took place at your house, the girls could 'a' got new frocks, the young people could have had a father's blessin', so to speak, with say a thousand pounds to set them up in their new home, and then the two families could have become friendly like. That's what we should have liked, sir."

"I have no doubt you would," remarked the Colonel dryly.

"Yes, and why couldn't it be now?" persisted Mrs. Barnes, who did not catch the intonation of his voice.

"You mean that they should get married from my house?" asked the Colonel.

But Mrs. Barnes was not to be caught. She had been warned by her daughters, and she was evidently afraid of them.

"I don't know about now," she replied after a pause. "My Jim's a high-spirited boy, he is, and as Emily said, you insulted him on Wednesday night, and he declared he'd make you pay for it. And there's no knowin' what *Jim will do* when his blood's up. He's like all the

Barneses in that way. The girls are just the same. They won't stand being spoken to by anybody. More than one place they've left during the war, because the foreman spoke sharp to them. 'We're not going to stand any cheek from any one, Mother,' they've said to me, and they won't. That's what makes it so hard for me."

"Yes, I should think you have rather a hard life, Mrs. Barnes," remarked the Colonel sympathetically.

"Hard, sir. You've no idea how hard. I'm nothing but a servant here, as I've said many and many's the time."

"Yes, girls are a great trouble, aren't they?"

"Trouble! you may well say so. But what can I do? Jim and the two girls keep the house, so to speak. They go out when they like and come in when they like, and I daren't speak a word. As for my Jim, he's a regular gentleman, he is, as you doubtless saw yourself."

"Of course you knew that your son had persuaded my sister to leave her home?" and John's question came out suddenly. "Do you think that was a gentlemanly thing to do?"

"What else could he do when the Colonel was so unreasonable?" retorted Mrs. Barnes. "'Tisn't as though we were a common family."

"I think it the action of a cad," remarked John, keeping his eyes steadily on the woman's face.

"Cad!" retorted the woman shrilly. "Cad! Cad yourself for saying such a thing! And I almost hope he *won't* marry her either, at least if her father won't——"

She ceased speaking suddenly as though she were afraid of saying too much.

"Remember there's such a thing as law," said John, "and my sister's not of age yet. Do you know it is a criminal act for a man to persuade a girl to leave her home?"

"Oh," *she replied,* "*you* are trying to come that dodge

over me, are you? Well, go to law. Jim persuaded her to leave home, did he? Well, I'll warrant she didn't need much persuading. She was as sweet as honey on him, she was. And Jim wanted to do the straight thing, he did. Well, if he didn't, your hoity-toity family have only got yourselves to blame."

"My other sister will protect her," said John, still closely watching the woman's face. "Even if your son is a blackguard, my sister has friends."

"They that live longest will see most," retorted Mrs. Barnes. "And now out you go. You'll get nothing from me. And my son isn't a blackguard, either. He wanted to do the thing straight, but I don't blame him, whatever he does, after the way the Colonel treated him."

When the Trelawneys reached the street the Colonel's face was drawn and haggard. "John, my boy," he said, "you had a purpose in speaking to that woman as you did."

"I didn't like the looks on the girls' faces," remarked the boy.

"But surely you don't think——"

"No, sir, I don't," replied John after a silence. "But I'm sure the fellow's a rotter. I still have faith that she may be with Eleanor."

"But how can we find Eleanor?"

"I think we'd better clear the ground first."

"How?"

"By finding Barnes."

"How can we do that?"

"For one thing we can go to the place where he works. You have the address, haven't you?"

"Yes. That was a good thought of yours, my boy. We'll go straight away. Ah, there's a taxi."

The Colonel did not speak a word during the drive from Camden Town to 8 Bywell Street. Ghastly

thoughts haunted his mind, thoughts which made him look years older.

"Can I speak to the manager?" he asked of a clerk as they entered a rather shabby looking office.

"Certainly, sir," said a man stepping forward. "Of course you want a house, or flat. They are difficult to get just now, but luckily we have a few on our books."

"No," replied the Colonel, "I am not in want of a house, thank you. I'm come on a rather personal matter. You employ a young man named Barnes, don't you?"

The man looked at the Colonel sharply. "Do you know him?" he asked.

"I know of him," replied the Colonel. "I want to speak to him. He works here, doesn't he?"

"He did," was the reply, "but he hasn't been here since Wednesday night. He'll get the rough side of my tongue when he does come back, and probably the sack."

"Then you don't know where he is?"

"I know he's greatly inconveniencing me. That's what I know. Fancy leaving me like this without a word of warning when he had one or two very promising prospects on hand. Some other firm will get them, I expect."

"Then you don't know when he'll be back?"

"I've had a hint that he'll be back to-morrow morning. But I don't know. I was never treated in such a way before. Fancy leaving me like that."

Just as the Colonel was leaving, a young man rushed to open the dor. As he did so he slipped a piece of paper in his hand.

"I think I can tell you something you ought to know," the Colonel read. "I shall leave the office for lunch at twelve forty-five."

CHAPTER XV

THE SEARCH FOR THE RUNAWAYS

"HAVE you any idea as to the meaning of this?" and the Colonel passed the slip of paper to John.

"I expect the fellow is a friend of Barnes," replied John. "At any rate it will be wise for us to be here early."

"I think so, too. Meanwhile we'll try to find Eleanor."

"How'll you start about it, sir?"

"Like you, I can't help connecting her with that woman Cory. I feel that she aided and abetted her."

"I think so too. But as I told you on the 'phone last night, she would say nothing. She absolutely refused to tell me if she knew where my sister had gone, or to give me her own address."

"She would. Still there may be ways of finding out. At any rate we'll go to the club you visited last night."

"Do you think she had any money?" enquired John.

"I asked your mother about that. She doesn't know. She says that Eleanor earned a good salary during the war, and for some time after, but she's no idea whether she spent it all or not. It seems, however, that she had her quarter's dress money about a month ago, and your mother is not aware of her spending any considerable amount since. Probably she has a few pounds with her. Why do you ask?"

"As I told you, Dad, I have little fear of Eleanor. I feel sure she can take care of herself. She can earn her own living, too. I was told while she was working in that

Government office that any business house would be glad to give her two hundred pounds a year. My idea is that if she has a few pounds, as you say, she'll get lodgings, and then look out for a job. I only hope Peg is with her. I say, Dad, I'm awfully sorry for you."

"Thank you, my boy. I do feel this badly. Even yet I can't realize that those girls have left home, and that Peg is in danger of ruining herself for life. It's simply horrible to think of. We are so much in the dark, too, and it may be that even now that child may be at some registry office getting married to that cad. Just think of it! The son of that woman! The brother of those girls! And that may not be the worst of it. I don't like the way those women talked, my boy."

"Nor I. Still I don't fear what's in your mind, Dad. I'm sure that Eleanor will make Barnes do the straight thing. I believe Barnes is afraid of her, too. Of course, I know he's a bounder, and a rotter, and capable of doing any dirty thing; but I've faith in Eleanor."

"I hope you're right, John. But how can one know? It may be that while Eleanor was with this woman Cory, the fellow was alone with Peg, and may have persuaded her to any madness. I'm almost mad myself as I think of it. But I can't understand Eleanor, getting under the influence of that woman Cory, and people of her kind. As you know, she openly denounced marriage, while Eleanor seemed to agree with her. And Peg heard her, while Barnes laughed. Good God, why did I allow such people to enter my house? I can't bear this any longer. Where are we?"

They were seated in a taxicab as they spoke, and were on their way to Tamsin Cory's club.

"We're just there, Dad. This is the place."

"No," replied the girl who was seated at a desk in a kind of office, "we don't know where Miss Cory is." This in *reply to the Colonel's* enquiry.

"Will she be here to lunch, do you think?"

"I don't think so. She is seldom here to lunch. As a matter of fact, we have very little accommodation for that kind of thing."

"Then, perhaps, you could tell me where she lives?"

"No," replied the girl, "we never do that sort of thing. It's against the rules of the club to give any member's address. But if you'd like to write her a letter, it'll be sent on to her immediately."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be of any use," replied the Colonel. "You see, I want to see her at once on a very important matter. If you could strain a point and give me her address——"

"Impossible; besides, it would be no good," interrupted the girl. "She's never at home during the day. She's nearly always at her work."

"Let me see," and the Colonel spoke like one trying to recall something, "I've forgotten where her place of business is."

"Is she a friend of yours?"

"She was at my house last Sunday night."

"Then you should know she's a journalist. She's the 'Counsellor of New Women,' on *The Women of To-morrow.* She's 'Aunt Mary' on *The Butterfly,* and she acts as Secretary for *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.*"

"A busy woman," remarked the Colonel.

"Yes, she is, and she's almost sure to be at the office of one of those papers. Of course I'm not sure. I hear that Dulotsky the great Russian Bolshevist is in London. She may be interviewing him. She's often used for that kind of job. Anyhow I can't give you the address of her flat, although I can send on letters.

"Here's one I'm sending to her now. I've just re-addressed it."

"That's a funny stamp," said John, who had taken no part in the conversation, but on whom the girl had

cast sundry smiles. "What nationality does it belong to?"

"I think it's Russian," replied the girl. "Miss Cory gets letters from all sorts of funny places."

"Does she, though?" asked John, smiling at the girl. "I'm awfully interested in stamp collecting. Do be a sport now, and let me look at it."

"It's not a love letter," tittered the girl. "Tamsin doesn't believe in that sort of thing."

"How do you know?" asked the boy with a laugh. "How do you know she hasn't a sweetheart somewhere? But that's not the point. I want to look at the stamp."

"What sort of stamps do *you* use when you write 'love letters'?" asked the girl with a giggle.

"I only kiss the place where the stamp ought to be, and then the postman takes it for love."

"For shame to talk like that when your father's listening," and the girl winked. "There, look at it if you like!"

John's quick eyes caught the address at a glance, 259 Black Inn Mansions.

"It's a nice stamp," remarked John. "I must ask Miss Cory to give it to me."

"She's often here of a night," replied the girl, "but this week I'm not here after five o'clock."

"Then I shall not come," was John's reply.

"You seem to have some experience in getting on with girls," remarked the Colonel when they got outside.

"She was making eyes at me all the time you were talking," replied the boy; "that's why I butted in. Anyhow, we've got the address. Perhaps Eleanor's there."

"Let's go and see," cried the Colonel eagerly.

But he was doomed to disappointment. When they arrived at Black Inn Mansions, a large block of buildings, made up of innumerable small, cheaply furnished rooms,

he discovered that Miss Tamsin Cory's apartments were vacant. He discovered that she shared certain rooms with two other women, and that the three had lived together some time. Neither of these women moreover appeared to correspond in the slightest degree with either Eleanor or Peggy, neither could they discover that the girls had been there.

"What now?" asked the Colonel with a sigh, when at length they had left Black Inn Mansions.

"The office of *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,*" replied the boy. "But I don't think you'd better appear."

"Why?"

"Because it's a Revolutionary paper, and you are a Colonel in the army. You stand for law and order, and that paper stands for the opposite."

"Of course you're right," replied the Colonel, "but it does seem strange that such rags should be allowed. Have you ever seen a copy?"

"I saw one of Mr. Davenport's men reading a copy," replied John. "Of course it's simply clotted rubbish, but it seems to be read by a lot of hot-heads. It talks a great deal about 'our Russian brothers,' speaks enthusiastically of the Red Flag, damns what it calls Capitalism, and says how glorious it would be if we had communism in England."

"I wonder why the Government allows it," said the Colonel, as if thinking aloud. "Of course I had heard something of industrial unrest in England, but I had no idea before I came home that revolution was advocated publicly."

"Go to Hyde Park on a Sunday afternon," laughed John.

"Anyhow, let's go to these offices of this paper," said the Colonel almost feverishly.

The quest was in vain, however. When John enquired if Miss Cory was there he was informed that she was

away doing work for the paper, and beyond that he could get no information. Neither could they get any news of her at the offices of *The Women of To-morrow,* or *The Butterfly.* At each place it was a matter of "No thoroughfare." Miss Tamsin Cory's movements seemed to be unknown. For that matter, the editor of *The Butterfly* told the Colonel that Miss Cory was seldom there. It was true she wrote a column every week over the signature of "Aunt Mary," but that this column did not necessitate her presence at the office.

"It's mainly answers to correspondence," he was informed, "and is especially written for young girls. Miss Cory is a good writer," added the editor, "but she's rather given to discussing politics, and that's no good for our readers."

"And now we'd better go to Bywell Street," said the Colonel when they had failed to find Miss Cory.

"All right, Dad, we can about manage to get there by a quarter to one."

True to his promise the young man who had spoken to them appeared at the door of the house agents at the time he had mentioned.

"Colonel Trelawney, sir?" he queried.

"Yes, I'm Colonel Trelawney," was the reply.

"My name's Wilkins, sir, Herbert Wilkins. I was in the Kent Buffs, and I work at the same place as Barnes."

"The house agent's place?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know where he is now?" the Colonel's voice was eager.

"I don't say that, quite, sir, but I think I do, in a way."

"You are a friend of Barnes?"

"No, sir, not a friend. You see, Barnes got a commission during the war, and wears a large sized hat as a consequence. I dare say I might have had a commis-

sion, too, if I'd played up for it, but I didn't. Anyhow, Barnes tries to play at being a swell, which he isn't. Any one can see that."

"But where is he now?"

"I'm coming to that. I was in the office last Wednesday when a letter came for Barnes. I took it to him, and saw that it had the War Office stamp on it. Barnes is a bit of a boaster and he told me it was from you, sir. He said you'd invited him to the Army and Navy Club to dinner. He told me, too, that he was going to marry your daughter and that he was going to settle things with you over a bottle of champagne."

"Indeed!" remarked the Colonel dryly, while John gave vent to some unparliamentary language.

"Of course I didn't believe it," remarked Wilkins, "although he asked me to go with him to the entrance of the club if I didn't trust his word. Well, to tell you the truth, I followed him, and saw him go into the Army and Navy Club, but he'd been there only a few minutes when he came out again looking very black. When he saw me he tried to make the best of it, and said that the affair was settled. I told him I didn't believe it, and then he bet me ten pounds that the wedding would come off in a week."

"This was outside the Army and Navy Club?"

"Perhaps a hundred yards away, sir."

"And then?"

"He went away, sir, but I didn't like the look on his face. I know the kind of chap he is, and how he's boasted that your daughter was in love with him. I remembered, too, sir, that I'd seen your son in France, Captain Trevor Trelawney, sir?"

"Yes, that's my son."

"Well, sir, remembering the kind of gentleman he was, and reading of the kind of gentleman *you* were, I *couldn't* believe you'd be willing to let your daughter

marry Barnes. And then I got to thinking of the look on his face as he left the club, and I was sure he'd heard nothing that pleased him there. After that, I had a feeling that something was wrong. I've got a bit of Sherlock Holmes in my nature, sir. So I went to Barnes' house that same night."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Colonel eagerly.

"They didn't seem pleased to see me, sir, which was a bit strange, for at other times, they, especially Barnes' sisters, have been very sweet on me. Before I'd been there long, I could see that something important was on, and presently it leaked out that you had insulted him, and as good as had him thrown out of the club.

"I don't know how it was, sir, but the spirit of mischief seemed to possess me, so I said with a laugh: 'That's how the Colonel invited you to dinner, is it? That's how you settled everything over a bottle of fizz, Barnes? What about our ten pound bet?'

"This made him in a worse temper than ever, and he seemed to lose all control over himself. 'Don't you make any mistake, Wilkins,' he said. 'I'll drag the whole lot of 'em into the mud: I'll not be insulted for nothing. I've got my plans all made.'

"'She'll not marry you against her father's will,' I says. 'Won't she?' and he laughed. 'Why, she's fair gone on me. She'll do anything I ask her—anything. See?'

"'I don't believe it,' I says. 'The Colonel's a gentleman, and you can't make me believe that a family of that sort is going to get mixed up in that sort of thing.'

"'A lot you know, Wilkins,' and there was an ugly look on his face as he spoke. 'Why, both the girls is leavin' home anyhow. They can't stand the old man, and Eleanor has took a flat not a thousand miles from the Holborn *Town Hall.* Now then? And I know of a

all.' Then I scribbled that note, sir, for I felt you ought to know what I have told you."

"And that's all?"

"That's all, sir. I'm afraid it won't help you much, and I'm more sorry than I can tell that I didn't try to find out where you lived, on Wednesday night, and told you all I had to tell then. But really, sir, I didn't think it was serious. Even now I have my doubts whether there is anything in it."

"I'm very much obliged to you, anyhow," said the Colonel. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me your home address."

"Certainly, sir, 32 Hope Terrace, Camden Town. May I ask, sir, if there's anything wrong?"

"I don't know yet," replied the Colonel. "I hope not. Still, I'm greatly obliged to you. Here's my card. Would you mind telephoning to me the moment you hear of—Barnes' whereabouts?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You've not said a word about this to any one?"

"No, sir, not a word."

"Then don't. It shall be to your advantage not to. And that reminds me that I've kept you from your lunch, so I must claim the privilege of paying for it."

He passed a note into Wilkins' hand as he spoke, and then returning the man's salute he turned to his son.

"Well, my boy, what do you think of it?"

"That we've a great deal to think about, Dad. I suggest that we go to your club, and go over everything point by point."

A few minutes later father and son entered the Army and Navy Club together.

CHAPTER XVI

ELEANOR SECURES A POSITION

WHILE Colonel Trelawney was travelling from Plymouth to London Eleanor and Peggy were sitting in an uncomfortably furnished room in a large block of buildings not far from the Holborn Town Hall. The former was very pale, and much wrought upon. Except for her pallor, however, she showed very few signs of it. She was quiet in her movements, and spoke in a natural tone of voice. Eleanor was not given to excitement, and she prided herself upon hiding her feelings.

She had, on the previous day, come to an important decision. Under the influence of Tamsin Cory, and others of her friends, she had determined to leave home. Her anger with her father had been increased by what these women had said to her.

"If you are willing to be a doormat," Tamsin had said to her, "and have not enough spirit to stand up against a tyrant, then you'll knuckle down to him, but I hope you are not that kind of girl. Strike for liberty. You can do very well for yourself without his help."

Eleanor had been silent at this outburst. Even although she agreed with her friend, she was not quite happy at the thought of it.

"You say he is going to dictate to you as to all your doings," went on Tamsin, "and that he has forbidden you to take me to your house because I march with the times. I tell you, my dear, if you don't strike for liberty now, you will never get it. Make a bold stand and he'll come to your terms."

Tamsin's influence over Eleanor was very strong, and

"Yes."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I am tired of living at home," and there was a tone in her voice which made Mr. Wakeham reflect again.

"The gallant Colonel strict on discipline, eh?" and he leered at her as he spoke.

"I have decided to go into a flat," was all the girl said in answer to this.

"Ah, that puts a different complexion on it," said Mr. Wakeham reflectively. "I work my secretary pretty hard, you know."

"I am not afraid of work," replied Eleanor.

When she left the office half an hour later, it was on the understanding that she should commence work on the following Monday, and Mr. Wakeham looked at himself in the mirror with evident satisfaction.

Perhaps this was the reason why she had been irritated and almost angry when Rod Ravenscroft had spoken to her about her friendships on her return home that day.

And now she sat alone with her sister, in the shabbily furnished room she had taken. In spite of her misgivings the romance and excitement of the situation still gave a glamour to the future. She had, at all events, justified her position to her father, and shown him that she was not to be trifled with.

Peggy, on the other hand, seemed to have no misgivings whatever. She was but a child, scarcely eighteen, and revelled in the thought of her liberty. She had an interview with Barnes, and his love-making had been so emphatic that she was almost delirious in her joy.

"Think of it!" she cried. "Won't he have a fit when he finds out?"

Eleanor made no reply. Older and more thoughtful than Peggy, she had sense enough to see the gravity of [illegible] situation. Added to this, she was not altogether

happy about Barnes. She instinctively felt his commonness and his lack of breeding, and but for her father's insistence that Peggy should have nothing more to do with him, she might have tried to persuade her to give him up. Inexperienced as she was, she felt that Peggy was taking a grave step, and she did not feel happy about it. Had they, like thousands of other girls, both left home simply with the determination to make their own living, and had Peggy succeeded in getting a situation equal to her own, she would have had no qualms. But she did not admire Barnes, and felt vastly uncomfortable.

"Jim will be here first thing in the morning," Peggy said with a laugh of triumph.

"Do you still persist in that business?" Eleanor asked.

"Of course I do," laughed the other. "Jim is getting the license, and says he has got a nice little flat ready for us. Won't it make his lordship sit up when he knows it?"

"You are a fool, Peg." There was bitterness in Eleanor's voice.

"That's all you know about it. While you are 'plugging' away in the city, I shall be enjoying myself."

"I tell you, you will get tired of him," insisted Eleanor.

"Will I? I am not that sort. When I make up my mind I don't alter. Besides, what business had he to insult Jim? I'll let him see that I am not a dog of the fetch-and-carry order. Ordered Jim out of the club, did he? Told him that if he came to the house he'd be kicked out! I'll let him see. Besides, we have agreed that we are both to go our own way."

"All right," assented Eleanor somewhat wearily, "if you have made up mind, you *have*. Only I cannot do anything for you after your marriage."

"Who wants *you to?*" asked Peggy. "I am able to

take care of myself, I can tell you, and Jim is so mad about me he'll do whatever I want him to."

The following morning Eleanor had an appointment with Tamsin Cory. She left the flat just before nine o'clock, leaving Peg alone. In spite of their professed delight at having their liberty, neither of them had slept much during the night, and although Eleanor would not admit it to herself she could not help comparing the shabby little cupboard of a bedroom with that of her own sleeping-room at Hampstead.

However, the glamour of the new situation still cast its spell upon her, and she left to keep her appointment with Tamsin in a confident, if a somewhat defiant state of mind.

"I shall be back in a couple of hours, Peg," she said to her sister. "See that you don't make a fool of yourself while I am away."

"What do you mean?" and there was a suggestion of anger in the younger girl's tones.

"I am not going to stand any nonsense with Barnes, you know."

"That's my affair," snapped Peggy. "I do not interfere with you, and I'll not have you interfere with me. Why, I might as well have stayed at home, if you are going to try to pull the elder sister stunt. Besides, I shall be all right; I can take care of myself."

Eleanor had not long left the flat when Barnes appeared. Evidently that gentleman was slightly nervous, and more than a little ill at ease. He was neither so confident nor so deliriously happy as he had appeared on the previous night. He, too, looked as though he had spent a wakeful night. His eyes were a trifle bloodshot, and his face had an unhealthy appearance.

Still he entered jauntily, and greeted Peggy very fervently.

[illegible] word, little girl," he said, "you look a little bit

washed out this morning. Not quite up to the mark, eh? You are not frightened, are you? The old man is in Plymouth, you know."

"Have you got the license, Jim?" she asked at length.

"No," replied Barnes, "I'm not so sure it's as easy as we thought."

"What do you mean?" and she looked at him suspiciously.

"Mean? Well, it's not so easy to explain. You see we shall have to be very careful."

"Of course we shall. We have discussed that a score of times. Have you found out anything new?"

Barnes looked at the girl intently. There was a look in his eyes which she did not like. There was something of shame in them, but more of evil, and determined as she was, she felt a little afraid.

"I suppose you have not got a drop of whiskey in the place?" asked Barnes. "I feel a bit below the mark this morning, and—and, but of course you haven't. Girls are not like fellows in that direction."

"Tell me what you have in your mind, Jim?" persisted the girl. "Why are you talking so strangely?"

"It's about the license; you see the law is very strict, and I could easily get into trouble."

"Get into trouble. How?"

"Well, for one thing you are not eighteen yet, and I have to give your age, and as far as I can find out a girl is legally under her parent's control until she is twenty-one. Don't you see?"

"Do you mean that you want to back out?" asked Peggy.

"Oh, no, no," replied Barnes quickly, "nothing of the sort. Back out indeed! Why, Peggy, I love you like my own life. I would do anything, everything for you!"

"But still I do not understand," persisted the girl.

"Oh, it *will be all right*," said Barnes, soothingly;

"don't you fear, little Peg; I'll make it all right. You love me, don't you?"

"I should not be here if I did not," replied Peggy, evidently comforted by his warm protestations of love.

"Of course you would not. That's why I feel as I do about this marriage business. Married or not, we love each other just the same, don't we, little Peg?"

"Of course we do, but tell me what you mean."

"I was only thinking about what Tamsin Cory said last Sunday night," and again Barnes looked uncomfortable. "After all, what is marriage? It is simply two people who love each other, taking each other as man and wife. It doesn't matter a bit about preachers, and law, and that kind of thing. For that matter I regard myself as married to you now. You love me and I love you, and always shall love you as long as I have breath. Not all the marriage services in the world could make me love you more, or make you more my wife than you are now. Don't you see, little Peg? There, kiss me again and tell me that you love me."

"Why are you saying all this?" she asked, after he had been talking some time.

"I am saying it because it would be worse than death for me to give you up," he cried with a strong affectation of fervour. "Look here, Peg, suppose the Registrar refuses to grant the license because you are under age, would you be willing to give me up?"

"But you can surely get over that, Jim. I have often heard of girls of my age getting married."

"Yes, if we had got your father's consent it would have been all right, but you see he won't give it."

"Then we must do without it. You told me we could. You said all we had to do was to get a special license from the Registrar, and that nothing could stop us."

"Yes, yes, I know, that is what I have hoped for, and what I have dreamed about, for oh, Peggy, you are all

the world to me. But you have found out what kind of a man your father is by this time. He is a regular military martinet, and if I told a lie about your age and we got married he could bring us up for perjury, and perhaps get me sent to prison. On the other hand I could not wait until you are twenty-one. I simply could not, Peggy."

When Barnes left the flat half an hour later, he was in a triumphant mood.

"I have got her," he cried; "she loves me so that she will do anything rather than lose me. When I told her about the little flat I have rented, and pictured our happiness together in it, I saw tears of joy come into her eyes. I may have a bit of trouble, but I'll get my own way, and then the Colonel will come to my terms."

Barnes spent the rest of the day avoiding his acquaintances and after dark, that night, made his way to his mother's house in Camden Town.

"What are you doing here?" asked his sisters, who were evidently much surprised to see him.

"Why should I not be here?"

"You told us you were going to get married to-day," Edith replied. "If you are, you should be with your wife. What about the little flat you have taken?"

"That's my own business," replied Barnes.

"Is it? Maybe it's our business, too," rejoined the sisters. "We know more than you think."

"What do you know?"

"We know that if you are not careful, the whole business will be stopped," was Edith's reply.

"Stopped! How can it be stopped?"

"Colonel Trelawney was here this morning, here before we had finished breakfast, with his son, and I can tell you this, Jim, he means business."

"Why, what did he say?"

"It wasn't *so much what* he said, as the way he looked.

Whatever you do, will have to be done quickly. He is not in a mood to be trifled with."

"You didn't let on anything, did you?" and there was anxiety in his voice.

"Of course we didn't. Tell us, Jim, is the matter settled?"

"It soon will be," he replied vaguely. "I have all my plans cut and dried whereby he'll be brought to heel all right."

"Then you are not married yet?"

Barnes was silent.

"You need not be so close, Jim," said Edith. "There is nothing to make such a fuss about. She is not much of a catch anyway, and I believe you'll be sorry about the whole business before many months are over. Don't make any mistake; Trelawney'll never own you as a son-in-law."

"Won't he!" cried Barnes defiantly. "I'll bet you a five-pound note he will."

"What's that you say, Jim?" asked Mrs. Barnes, who entered the room at that moment.

"Nothing, Mother. I'm only assuring the girls that I can look after my own business. I came here to-night just to know if anything had turned up. Look here, Mother, tell me what was said this morning when Colonel Trelawney came."

When Barnes left the house, half an hour later, he expressed himself as more confident than ever that he was master of the situation.

CHAPTER XVII

JIM BARNES TAKES A LICKING

FOUR days later Colonel Trelawney sat with his son John in the old play-room at Hampstead. Both were evidently tired and anxious. The Colonel looked ten years older than when he had arrived in England two weeks before. His face was ashy pale, deep creases were around his eyes, and lines which indicated suffering marked his face. It was now late at night and the house was in silence.

"We seem to be beaten, my boy," said the Colonel sadly.

John noted the look on his father's face, and sighed.

"Yes, Dad, we have made no headway," he admitted. "And as far as I can see, there is nothing more we can do."

"No, unless we put the whole thing in the hands of a private detective."

"I cannot do that," said the Colonel, starting to his feet and striding round the room. "I simply can't, John. It would mean that the whole business would get into the newspapers, and that I could not bear. Besides, think of telling one's family affairs to one of those fellows."

"Yes, it's a bit sickening, I admit, but they are up to all sorts of dodges that we should never think about."

"Well," sighed the Colonel, after a long silence, "the girls have defied us, and so far they have beaten us. You see we have hardly had any data upon which to go. It is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack. How can one find two girls amongst seven million people?"

"I believe that Cory woman knows where they are in spite of her denials," remarked John.

"Possibly, but what can one do? She says she knows nothing, and I have no means of forcing her to speak. As for the Barnes people, I have no doubt they know more than they will confess. Is there nothing you could advise, my son?"

John shook his head. "If you refuse to hire a private detective I don't see that there is," he replied. "We have followed up every possible clue. But don't bother too much, Dad, we shall know in time."

"Yes, but not until it is too late. Your mother's heart is breaking, my boy; that's what is troubling me. Think of the ruin of those two girls."

"As you know, Dad, I don't take the same view as you do about it, at least as far as Eleanor is concerned, and more than that, I do not believe she would allow any real harm to come to Peggy. As I have told you before, Eleanor has any amount of brains, and in spite of all her advanced talk is as cold as an icicle."

"Hark! What's that?"

"It sounds like some one at the front door," replied John. "There, that's a footstep on the drive."

The Colonel looked at his watch. "It's nearly midnight," he said; "who could be here at this time of night?"

He went into the hall as he spoke and looked eagerly round. There was nothing to be seen. He opened the front door and looked into the night, but no one was visible.

"I see nobody," he said aloud. "Yet I am sure I heard a footstep."

"Yes," said John eagerly, "so did I. Ah, here's a note lying on the white marble."

He picked it up and handed it to his father.

Colonel Trelawney noted the writing on the envelope

and moved quickly back to the room where they had been sitting.

"It's from *him*," he said as he tore open the envelope.

"From Barnes?" asked John.

The Colonel did not reply. His eyes were fastened on the sheet of paper. John watched his father's face as he read, saw the look of anger that flashed from his eyes, noted the compression of his lips. Evidently he read the letter more than once, and then stood gazing into the fireplace with unseeing eyes.

"Any news, Dad?" asked the boy.

"Read it," was the reply, as he passed the note over to John.

"DEAR COLONEL TRELAWNEY," the note read, "Of course you have been wondering what has become of your daughter Peggy. Doubtless, too, bearing in mind our interview in the Army and Navy Club, you will have connected her disappearance with me. Although we parted on rather unfriendly terms, I am willing to discuss the situation with you either at your own house or at any other place or time you may care to mention. If you are reasonable we can no doubt come to an amicable settlement. But for Peggy's sake, as well as your own, I should advise you to fall in with the idea of an interview. If you do not, you will only have yourself to blame if matters turn out unpleasantly, and your family pride is badly hurt. It is largely a matter of indifference to me, but I thought I would give you this opportunity of coming to terms.

"Yours sincerely,

"JAMES BARNES.

"P. S. Any letter addressed to 8 Bywell Street will find me."

"What do you think of it?" asked the Colonel.

John did not reply for a few seconds, but his father noted the quivering nostrils, and the flash of his usually quiet, gray eyes.

"His meaning's pretty plain," and the Colonel noticed that there was a change in his voice, a tone which suggested restrained passion. Indeed John looked positively dangerous at that moment. Hitherto his father had looked upon him as a quiet, and somewhat unemotional boy—one who thought about things carefully, but who did not feel very deeply. Now he saw his mistake. His youngest son was showing characteristics of which he had not dreamed. His every movement suggested energy and decision, and he saw how muscular was the lithe form which moved quickly round the room.

"Dad!" cried John, "I wish you would let me deal with him."

"Why?" asked the Colonel.

"He's too dirty, too mean, too contemptible for you to touch. Your hands must not be soiled by thrashing him. Leave him to me."

Even although the Colonel's mind was torn with anxiety, he could not help smiling at the way his son spoke. Never had he seen so deeply into his nature as then. There was such a healthy scorn for meanness, such a manifestation of a clean mind, such anger and contempt for what was base.

"We'll not talk about that now, my son. The question at present is—what shall we do?"

"Oh, see him! Have it out with him!" John spoke through his set teeth.

"But when, and where?"

"Not here!" cried the boy. "Don't let our house be fouled by his presence again! Don't, under any pretext, let him enter our door!"

"Would you suggest that he should come to one of my clubs then?"

"No," John almost shouted. "Engage a room at a hotel! And you'll let me come with you, won't you, *Dad?*"

"Evidently he has returned to business again. The real estate agent's place is in Bywell Street."

For more than an hour the two discussed the situation, and when at length they parted at the Colonel's bedroom door, their plans were fully made as to their future proceedings.

"Is that you, Lester?" It was Mrs. Trelawney who spoke.

"Yes, Alice. I hoped you were asleep."

"I—I can't sleep," she moaned. "I feel as though I shall never sleep again. Have you found out anything?"

The Colonel was silent.

"Have you found out anything?" she repeated, and she lifted herself in the bed as she spoke. "Oh, please tell me! I feel that I am going mad!"

Trelawney switched on the light and saw that his wife's face was pale with anguish. In her eyes, too, was a look of terror.

"Tell me!" she cried; "you have heard something, haven't you?"

"I got this to-night," he said, handing Barnes' letter to her.

"What does it mean?" she asked, when she had read it through. "I cannot comprehend!"

"It is difficult to tell *what* it means," he replied evasively. "All I can gather is that Peggy is with him, and that he wants to come to some sort of terms with me."

"But he says nothing about Eleanor."

"No. Perhaps we shall find out to-morrow."

"You are going to see him then?"

"Yes," replied the Colonel grimly. "Cheer up, Alice, things may not be as bad as you imagine. At any rate, we shall know the worst to-morrow."

His wife burst into violent sobbing. "Oh, think of it, *Lester, think of our little* Peg being associated with a

low brute like that; think of all the loving care we have bestowed upon her only to throw herself away, and ruin her life! Day after day I have been hoping against hope. I have tried to believe that Peggy was with Eleanor, who would save her from marrying such a wretch. But she is still our child, Lester—she is still our child——"

"Yes, she is still our child," assented the Colonel.

"But what are you going to do? Are you going to recognize the marriage?"

The Colonel was silent. He saw that even now she had not dreamed of the ghastly possibility that haunted his own mind, and he would not mention it until he was certain as to what had taken place. Never had the tragedy of the whole thing appeared to him so strongly as now. He was ashamed, angered, almost heart-broken at the action of his child.

"At any rate she is alive," said Mrs. Trelawney, presently; "that is some comfort."

The Colonel made no reply. He felt the truth of the old saying that there are some things worse than death.

"In spite of that awful letter," went on Mrs. Trelawney, "I feel a bit happier. But oh, my husband, I am sorry for you. It seems as though after all those ghastly years you have come back to something more horrible than the things you had to contend with away in the East; and I had so looked forward to your coming, too. So often, I pictured us as a happy, reunited pair with our children around us."

"I cannot understand it even yet," said the Colonel.

"Cannot understand what, my dear?"

"Cannot understand this spirit of defiance, this utter lack of respect for father and mother."

"As I keep telling you, darling, it is in the very air we breathe. It seems as though the spirit of revolution has not only got abroad in the world of Governments, but of

home life. Much of the family life which I knew as a girl seems to have gone."

"But why should it be so?" asked the Colonel sadly.

"It is because religion is dying," replied his wife. "Both Eleanor and Peg refuse to go to church. They have told me they never pray; they have said that the Commandments were meaningless to them."

"Yes, yes, I suppose that's it," he admitted; "but think of the ghastliness of it. Think of the time when I used to put them to bed and hear them say their prayers; and realize what they are doing now. My God! If this is the march of the times,—the progress of the age—the Lord have mercy upon us!"

"I cannot believe they realize the pain they are giving us," pleaded the mother. "It's only thoughtlessness."

"Anyhow, it's a tragedy for us," said the Colonel. "I dread to think of the future."

"Have you forgotten God?" asked his wife.

"Perhaps I had," replied the Colonel. He marched round the room several times and then knelt by his bedside.

Evidently Barnes was regarded as a good business man, for although angry words passed between him and his employer, he found himself installed in his old place, even although he had taken several days' leave of absence without the consent of his firm. Wilkins had asked him a good many questions on his arrival, but Barnes had been very non-committal in his replies. Indeed, he did not seem at all happy, but started at every sound and anxiously observed every stranger who came into the office.

About eleven o'clock on the morning following the evening on which Colonel Trelawney and his son had discussed the situation, a letter was brought to him. Barnes opened it almost feverishly and read as follows:

"Colonel Trelawney will be in Room 394 at the Cosmopolitan Hotel to-night at seven o'clock, when he will give Mr. Barnes the interview he suggests. Will Mr. Barnes please send a line by bearer confirming this arrangement?"

Barnes smiled triumphantly. "I've got him," he reflected. "I was afraid he might mount the high horse and refuse to see me. But evidently he means to be reasonable."

Yet his mind was not easy. Wilkins, who watched him closely, saw that he seemed anxious and perturbed. He was only able to give half his mind to business, and often he gazed with unseeing eyes at the books which lay before him.

At lunch time he entered into conversation with a fellow-clerk named Jenkins, with whom he was supposed to be friendly. Jenkins had also been in the army, and although he had not, like Barnes, succeeded in getting a commission, he was very ambitious from a social point of view. Indeed, Jenkins had cast longing eyes towards the junior partner's eldest daughter, and had listened greedily to Barnes' accounts of his relations with the Trelawney family.

Soon after six o'clock that evening Colonel Trelawney made his way to the Cosmopolitan Hotel. He, too, had spent an anxious day, but no one in the War Office had guessed the state of his mind. Colonel Trelawney was one of those quiet men who talk little of their private affairs. When he reached the hotel vestibule he looked eagerly around as if in expectation of seeing some one, but he was disappointed. He saw no one whom he knew. He was quickly shown into the room he had engaged, and arrived there, threw himself wearily into an armchair. Evidently the apartment had been often used for small gatherings. A table stood in the middle

around which was placed six chairs, and on which several sheets of blotting-paper lay.

For more than a quarter of an hour the Colonel sat alone. The room was very quiet and was situated in a part of the hotel not much in public use. Presently he heard a quick step outside, and John entered.

"Five minutes to seven, Dad," he said, looking at his watch. "I'm in good time, aren't I? Did you make arrangements at the office?"

"Yes," replied the Colonel. "I told the clerk to have the fellow shown in at once."

"Good," said John, looking around the room with satisfaction.

Again the Colonel was impressed by the change which had come over his younger son. Usually quiet and unemotional, he was now alert and almost excited. He walked round the room with a springy step, and the Colonel again noticed the muscular, well-knit frame he had. There was a depth of chest and a breadth of shoulder which had not been manifest to him before.

The clock had scarcely struck seven when they heard the sound of voices in the passage outside, followed by a knock at the door. A moment later one of the hotel servants ushered in two men, Barnes and another. John moved his chair close to that of his father, and sat quietly watching; his gray eyes looked hard and determined. The Colonel appeared perfectly calm, but his compressed lips and steady gaze showed that he was in no holiday mood.

Barnes wore a jaunty air. He had well primed himself with whiskey before coming, and now felt very valiant. He had rehearsed as much of the situation as he thought necessary with Jenkins, his companion.

"Good-evening, Colonel," said Barnes, airily. "I got your letter this morning, and am here to the tick, as you see."

The Colonel nodded, but did not speak.

"This is my friend, Mr. Jenkins," he went on. "I thought it best to have a third party present. You see, I did not expect you to bring your son. Jenkins, this is Colonel Trelawney. Colonel Trelawney, this is Mr. Wilfred Jenkins. I hope you gentlemen will become better acquainted in the future." Jenkins stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Proud to meet you, Colonel," he said, but the Colonel did not appear to notice the hand. He simply nodded.

Barnes looked on awkwardly. He had carefully rehearsed what he meant to say, but somehow his words did not come easily. Still he was "whiskey valiant," and, as he had said to Jenkins on his way to the hotel, he felt ready for anything. He had expected, too, that although the Colonel might be angry, he would naturally ask where his daughter was, and this would lead up to the things he meant to say. The Colonel's silence, therefore, was rather confusing, and made his part difficult to play.

"I must say," he said at length, "in view of the letter I sent you last night I expected you'd meet us alone. Still, I don't mind. How are you, old thing?" and he turned affably towards John.

John's lips quivered, but he did not speak. He was intently watching every movement of the two men.

"I don't suppose you are altogether surprised, Colonel," Barnes went on. "I expect you have found out by this time the kind of fellow I am."

"You suggested an interview," remarked the Colonel, "and I have arranged for it. Will you tell me what you have to say?"

"Look here, Colonel," said Barnes truculently, "come off the roof or you'll be sorry. I did not come here to be treated like a naughty boy. I know what I know, and *that's straight.*"

The Colonel quietly took Barnes' letter from his pocket. "I see by your letter," he said, "that you say this:

"'If you are reasonable we can no doubt come to an amicable settlement. But for Peggy's sake, as well as your own, I should advise you to fall in with the idea of an interview.'

Will you kindly explain that, Mr. Barnes?"

Barnes was still under the influence of the whiskey he had drunk, and he also remembered what he had told Jenkins concerning his intended mode of procedure. He had boasted that he would quickly bring the proud Nabob to terms, and would show him that he, Barnes, was not a man to be played with.

"Oh, you persist in taking that line, do you?" he said. "Well, all right, but don't blame me if things don't turn out to your liking."

"What things?" asked the Colonel.

"What's the use of talking like that? You know well enough. You insulted me at the Army and Navy Club a few days ago. You treated me as though I were a dog, even after you had me up to your place to supper. I told you then that I was not the kind of man to be treated in that way. I offered to do the straight thing, and you actually rang for a servant to throw me out of the club. Do you think I could stand that?"

The Colonel's face was as immovable as that of the Sphinx.

"I told you," went on Barnes, "that if many fellows had been in my place, seeing how sweet your girl was on me, there would be a bad story to tell."

"I know *this*, Mr. Barnes," replied the Colonel, "that in spite of what I have said you persuaded my child to leave home."

"Precious *little* persuading she needed," laughed

Barnes. "In fact, it was she who did all the persuading."

At this John started to his feet, and took a step towards Barnes; he quickly checked himself, however, and without a word went back and sat by his father's side again.

"Oh, yes," sneered Barnes, "your high and mighty ways are no good with me. I am as good as you are. As for persuading Peg to leave home, as I have just said, I had no need to do any persuading."

"And where is she now?" asked the Colonel, who had difficulty in speaking calmly.

"We'll come to that presently," replied the other. "I'll tell you this, though; she has been living with me for three days in a little flat I have taken."

"Well," said the Colonel, "what then?"

"What then! You're mighty cool about it; but I have got this to say to you, you must not blame me for what I have done. I offered you straight to marry her. You refused, and now you must take the consequences."

"Do you mean to say you are not married?" John again rose from his chair as he spoke.

"Ah, I have touched you on the quick at last, have I?" and Barnes laughed loudly. "You did not think when you sneered at me and called me a bounder, and a low-bred swine, that I would pay you out."

"Do you mean to say you are not married?" and John repeated the words again with a quivering voice.

"There was no need for that," laughed Barnes; "she was willing to come with me on any terms."

"You are a liar," said the boy.

For a moment there was a silence. Barnes, in spite of his loud protestations, looked uncomfortable, while Jenkins, who had been eagerly watching, first the Colonel and then John, seemed to be in doubt as to his own *standing* there.

"Liar, am I?" said Barnes. "Why, what's the use of talking? You saw yourself how sweet she was on me. Besides, I made up my mind to pay the Colonel out for insulting me. He thought I was dirt under his feet, didn't he?"

"Have you brought your witness with you in order to say this to me?" remarked the Colonel.

"Not exactly," replied Barnes, "still, it's just as well that you should know how things are. Besides, I want to do the straight thing, even now."

For a moment the Colonel almost lost control over himself. "Straight thing," he repeated. "*You* do the straight thing."

"Yes," replied Barnes, "and that's why I brought my friend Jenkins here with me; he's a gentleman, and will not let on."

"Well, what do you regard as the straight thing?" asked the Colonel.

"Look here, Colonel," said Barnes, adopting a more friendly air, "of course I know you are a bit cut up—naturally you are, and naturally, too, since Peg and I have been living together, I have thought a good deal about your feelings, and this is what I have got to say, here in the presence of a witness: If you'll be reasonable in spite of the fact that I've got the whip hand of you, I'll do the honourable thing and make her an honest woman, there."

"What do you mean by being reasonable?" asked John.

"Do you wish me to answer him, Colonel? Mind, I wanted this matter to be kept strictly between ourselves, but if you want me to talk freely in his presence I will."

"Yes, answer him."

"Well, then, I mean this: no one need know anything about what's *taken place*. You'll receive me as a son-in-

law in a proper way, and Peg shall be Mrs. Barnes. There, now."

"What do you mean by receiving you as a son-in-law in the proper way?" asked the Colonel.

"You know what I mean well enough—receive me as you did up at your place that Sunday night. Do the thing handsome, help us towards getting a little home, and—and, there you are. I need not say any more."

"And if I won't?" asked the Colonel.

"If you won't," and Barnes laughed again, "then don't blame me. I have offered to do the honourable thing. I might get tired of her, and then,—well, perhaps we had better say no more about it. But I don't threaten. Come now, Colonel, what do you say? I am no fool. I mean to get on in my business, and I'll make her a good husband."

"No," said the Colonel, "I will never receive you into my house."

"What do you mean? You say you'll—you'll ——"

"I mean to say," and the Colonel spoke in low, clear tones, "that I will never admit such a low, contemptible creature as you into my house as a relation of mine."

"Then you'll let your daughter be spoken of as a ——"

"Stop!" cried John, starting to his feet. "Dad, I must have a word here. Look here, Barnes, I know why you brought this fellow here with you. You were afraid to meet my father alone. You came here to blackmail him, you came here with a trumped-up story which you thought would deceive him."

"I have come with no trumped-up story," replied the other, "and don't blame me if I drag your sister in the mire."

"I am not going to bandy words," said John, pulling the table to the side of the room, "one could not with a thing like you,—but I am going to give you the best *licking you* have ever had in your life. But before I do

it I am going to tell you something. I said just now that you were a liar; you are; and the worst kind of a liar. You said you were not married to my sister. You are. There's not much to congratulate her on that, but do you think we are fools? I have been to Somerset House to-day, I have been to the Registry Office where you were married: I have seen the books, I have seen her signature and yours. It's a ghastly business, and I would rather see her dead than married to you, but still there it is. There's something else, however. You insulted my sister; you said you had no need to persuade her to live with you without marrying her. I am going to make you pay for that."

"John, my boy!" cried the Colonel, "is that true?" It was the first time his father had lost complete control over himself.

"Yes. I have not been to the works to-day. I felt sure after I read his letter last night that he had something like this in his mind. I knew that Peg would not do what he said; I knew, too, that Eleanor would see to that, but I wanted to make sure, and I gave up the day to it. Now then, Mr. Barnes, strip. Oh no, I'm not going to take any mean advantage of you; you have got your friend here to see fair play."

"I'm not a baby killer," sniggered Barnes uneasily.

"You insulted my sister," replied the boy. "I know my father is longing to give you a thrashing, but I will not let him dirty his hands by touching you. Now strip. You shall have fair play," and John threw off his coat as he spoke and rolled up his shirt sleeves.

Barnes looked first at the Colonel then at Jenkins.

"What the young gentleman says is quite fair, Barnes," replied Jenkins, who was altogether thrown off his balance by the course things had taken. "Besides, you can give him more than fourteen pounds in weight, and *you can't back out, man!* I'll see you get fair play."

The Colonel's face was a study. The whole interview had been agony to him. Yet his son's revelation had brought him a sense of relief difficult to describe. The thought of her being Barnes' wife was horrible to him, and yet he felt a sense of satisfaction in what John had said. The Colonel came of an old fighting stock and he knew that there was only one way to deal with a certain class of individual. It is true there was something repellent in the thought of what might be regarded as a vulgar brawl, and yet a sense of joy filled his heart as he saw the flash of his boy's eyes.

By this time Jenkins had helped Barnes to take off his coat, and was whispering words of counsel in his ears.

"You need not fear, Barnes," laughed John, who went to the door and locked it. "As it happens, my father is a sportsman and a gentleman, and he will see fair play, while you, on your side, have your friend with you."

"But I don't want this," cried Barnes. "I didn't mean what I said, and—and—I apologize,—there!"

"I don't accept your apology, and I am going to give you a licking for insulting my sister."

"You thrash me? Don't blame me if you are in bed for the next week."

"I won't," replied John. "Now then, Mr. Barnes."

It was a quite unequal contest. John had been in the boxing finals at Rugby only a year or so before, while Barnes was utterly ignorant of the science of boxing. Besides, although he was nine years older than John, and perhaps a score of pounds heavier, he was in bad condition. He carried too much flesh, his muscles were soft and flabby, and added to this he had been drinking. He never once reached his opponent, while again and again he fell heavily on the floor before the vigorous and well-aimed onslaughts of the boy.

"Have you had enough?" cried John at length.

Barnes was lying on the floor, and did not reply. He

was stunned, bleeding, and with the last particle of courage knocked out of him.

"I have not finished with you yet," cried John.

His father had wondered what the parcel John had brought to the hotel contained. He was enlightened now, however, for quick as a thought John produced a fairly heavy horsewhip and while Jenkins was too astonished to protest, he prevented Barnes from rising to his feet.

"Now, Mr. Barnes," said John, "I have about finished with you, but before I kick you out of the room you will tell me where my sister is at this moment."

"I won't," said Barnes with an oath.

"Won't you?" cried the boy. "We'll see," and the whip fell heavily on his prostrate body.

"Help! Jenkins, help!" cried Barnes.

"Now then," laughed John, lifting the whip again, "tell me before I give you a few more."

Barnes muttered the name of the street and the number.

"You have got that down, Dad, haven't you? Now then, what's my sister Eleanor's address? Quick!"

Again Barnes spoke. All courage and fight had gone out of him.

"Good," said the boy. "You can get up now."

Barnes slowly rose to his feet, aching in every limb, half blind, his body stinging with pain.

"It has not been an altogether successful interview for you, has it?" laughed John. "Now then, I want to say this to you before I kick you out of the room. I shall have my eye upon you, and if you are unkind to Peg, or if you are up to any of the dirty tricks of which I know you are capable, I will not let you off as lightly as this. Now go."

A minute later the Colonel and his son were alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GIRLS ARE LOCATED

JOHN laughed as he put on his coat. He was still somewhat excited although he had himself well under control.

"I don't think Mr. Barnes is very happy just now," he said. "Thank you for not interfering, Dad. I couldn't have gone home happy if I had not put the fear of death into him."

The Colonel was silent. The whole evening had been a nightmare to him, and although he could not help a feeling of satisfaction at Barnes' discomfiture, the grim realities of the whole business stood before him bare and gaunt.

"We've no need to search further now," went on John. "We know Eleanor's address, and where Peg is, —that's something, anyhow."

"Yes, it's something," admitted the Colonel.

He started to his feet and walked around the room. He had been able to keep calm during the time Barnes was there, but now he could no longer contain himself.

"My boy," he said, "this is hell! Just think of it!—Yes, I am relieved, and more than relieved at what you have found out to-day. I had feared—other things. I felt instinctively that the fellow was a villain, and I was afraid. But even as it is, the thought of a child of mine having to spend her life with a thing like that is horrible, horrible!"

"Peg doesn't seem to think so."

"No, but she will. She may be infatuated for the

moment, but in a few weeks she will realize the nature of the beast to which she is married, and then I dread to think what may happen."

"Yes, it's pretty bad," admitted John with a sigh. "But, by Jove, I am glad I gave him a licking! And yet it was not much fun: he had no fight in him. He's just a heap of flesh,—that's all, and had no more idea of using his fists than a flapper. I got almost tired of knocking him down. I was only afraid lest the other fellow should butt in, and then you'd have had to take part in it."

"It was not a very dignified affair."

"Dignified!" cried John. "How could you be dignified with a fellow like that? He has no sense of decency. Nothing but brute force would make any appeal to him. I have known that all along."

"And you say you suspected, when you read his letter last night, that things would turn out as they have?"

"I knew Eleanor," cried the boy, "and I felt sure in spite of all her talk that she would not allow Peggy to do what you feared. I was certain, too, that Peg was not that sort of girl, obstinate and mad as she is. I wondered why I had not thought of going to Somerset House before: but I did not say anything for fear I might be mistaken. First thing this morning, however, I started to make sure, and I have got everything in black and white."

"Thank you, my boy; you are a greater comfort to me than you can imagine. I don't know what I should have done but for you."

Tears started to John's eyes as his father spoke. Like all modern boys he would suffer anything rather than show any kind of emotion, but he was so much moved by his father's words that he dared not try to speak.

"Barnes will be a bit sensitive for the next day or two," *he laughed.* "But what now, Dad?"

"What would you advise, my boy?"

It was wonderful how the Colonel turned to this lad of his. For years he had been a self-contained man acting on his own initiative, and not seeking the advice of others, but now, almost instinctively, he turned to his boy for advice and guidance, and rejoiced in being able to do so.

"Let's go home to Mother."

A few minutes later the Colonel had paid for the room at the hotel, and they were on their way to Hampstead.

Mrs. Trelawney knew the moment they entered that something had happened.

"What is it?" she asked feverishly. "You have found out something?"

"Yes," replied the Colonel.

"You have seen them? You know where they are?"

"We know where they are, but we haven't seen them."

"But why? Where are they? Tell me everything quickly."

"Eleanor has got work in the city," replied the Colonel. "She's a secretary in a business house, and she's living in a block of flats which goes by the imposing name of St. Hildebrand's Mansions."

"And is Peg with her?" The question was almost a gasp.

The Colonel shook his head. "She's with that fellow," he replied.

"Lester, tell me; you don't mean——" She did not finish the sentence, but John, who was watching every expression of her face, felt sure of the ghastly thought that had haunted her.

"She married him three days ago, Mother," the boy informed her. "It took place at a Registry Office. See, here are the papers. I was able to get a copy of them."

She snatched the copy of the marriage certificate from his hand, as a ravenous beast might snatch its prey, and

eagerly devoured every word. Then she threw her arms around her husband's neck and sobbed convulsively. "Oh, my darling," she said, "thank God, it's no worse!"

"Did you fear anything worse?" asked the Colonel.

"I feared everything," she replied. "I would not admit it even to myself, but I have been half mad for days. You are sure this is all right?" and she nodded towards the certificate.

"Absolutely," replied the Colonel grimly. "At any rate, you know the worst now."

A weight seemed to have dropped from the mother, and she became almost cheerful. "Tell me what happened," she said. "Let me hear everything."

The Colonel described the interview minutely, while she listened intently, seeming scarcely to breathe. When he came to the description of John's part in the affair, however, a change passed over her face. She looked anxiously at the boy and there was a fearful look in her eyes.

"Oh no, no, not that!" she cried. "He is bigger and stronger than you, John."

"Is he?" laughed John. "Ask him. I bet you ten pounds to a penny, Mother, that he'll not forget this night in a hurry."

"And you—you——?"

"Yes, I horsewhipped him," laughed the boy. "No decent fellow could help it. Why, he insulted Peg,—but he'll think twice before he tries on that sort of thing again."

They now found themselves able to talk over the whole matter quietly and collectively, later. Now that she knew where her two girls were, and that the dark clouds of mystery which had surrounded them had been swept aside, Mrs. Trelawney was able to talk calmly, almost hopefully. Her heart went out to them, too, defiant and *disobedient as they* had been. She was still

their mother, and she began to make all sorts of plans as to what could be done for them.

"We must not be hard on them, Lester," she said. "They are our children still."

"Yes, they are our children still," assented the Colonel, "but what can we do for them?"

"Oh, I want them home! I want them home!"

"Yes," replied the Colonel, whose heart, in spite of himself, had been embittered by the scene through which he had just passed, "but they left home. They have defied us. Remember Eleanor's letter, my dear, and think of what Peg has done."

"Yes, but they are our children." It was the mother-heart that pleaded. "You would not close your doors against them, would you?"

The Colonel thought a few seconds before speaking. "No," he replied. "As you say, they are our children, and our door must be always open to them, but evidently they don't want to come home."

"Ah, but they will. They will see the meaning of what they have done, and then their hearts will turn to us. We must go to them, and tell them that we love them still," and she looked into her husband's eyes pleadingly.

"I think I see what's in your mind, Alice," and the Colonel could not help speaking somewhat sternly. "If Eleanor will come home repentant and contrite, and will promise obedience, she shall receive a glad welcome. She shall not be reproached or upbraided,—but she must be penitent and obedient."

"Yes, I suppose you are right," Mrs. Trelawney sighed after a long silence; "but what of little Peggy?"

"Our home must be Peg's home, too," replied the Colonel. "As you say, she is our child."

"But what—of that man? She has married him. He is her husband."

"I know nothing of that," replied the Colonel. "To me he is a complete outsider, and—and he is beneath contempt. I will not have my house sullied by his presence. As for Peggy, she knew my will about the matter. I forbade her to have anything further to do with him, but she defied me. In face of our wishes she left home for him, and she has well-nigh broken our hearts. I know that she's still our child. Even her defiance and her disobedience have not undone that fact, and if ever she needs me she knows where to find me. But that poisonous thing!—no, I will not have him here!"

As Mrs. Trelawney looked at her husband's face she knew that he was adamant, and that no amount of pleading on her part would alter him. "Then what can we do?" she asked.

"Nothing," was the reply. "They have defied us. They have left us. There is nothing to be done."

"But I want to see my children. I want to tell them I love them still! Don't you see, Lester? Peg's in the power of that man, while Eleanor will be homeless, friendless."

"Not by any act of mine," replied the Colonel. "Both of them went away by their own desire, and we have no reason to believe that they wish to come back. I could not rest until I knew what had happened to them, but now I know, there is nothing more to be done. They have made their bed, and they must lie on it."

"I am afraid you are right," his wife admitted, "but I want to see them. Let the first overtures of affection come from our side."

"What do you want me to do?" Trelawney asked.

"Let us go to them, Lester. Let us make them feel that they are not homeless."

"Well," replied the Colonel, after a silence, "I think you are right. We will do that. But when?"

CHAPTER XIX

ELEANOR AND PEGGY DEFIANT

BARNES did not return to Peggy immediately after his interview with the Colonel. As may be imagined, he was in no very enviable frame of mind. When he had returned to lunch after receiving the Colonel's note he had been in great good humour, and had informed Peggy that he would quickly bring her father to reason. The girl had asked him many questions as to what this meant, but he had been very non-committal in his replies. He assured her, however, that when he returned that night he would have good news for her. This had set Peggy wondering greatly, for she saw that Barnes was much excited, and that he really believed in what he was saying. He had told her that he would not return until about eight o'clock, and when that hour arrived, and still another hour had passed away, and he did not come, she began to grow anxious. Presently she felt she could not bear to stay indoors any longer, and found her way into the streets. It was because of this that her father and mother had failed to find her when they had called.

It was a rainy, cheerless night, and for the first time since she had left home, Peggy realized something of the meaning of what she had done. A sense of loneliness and of bewilderment possessed her. She wandered into the dismal drabness of Grays Inn Road, then passed into High Holborn, almost heedless of whither she went. She could not help wondering what her father and mother were doing, and whether they were trying to find her. She almost hoped they were.

Since she had left home, her life had been so full of excitement that she had had but little time to think of the meaning of what she had done. In fact, during the few days of her married life, Barnes had taken her from restaurant to restaurant, from theatre to theatre, and from dancing-room to dancing-room, without cessation. But that day she had been left alone, with the exception of the hour when Barnes had come home to lunch; and she had been led to think furiously. The excitement of the past few days was passing away, and she felt utterly depressed.

She walked some distance in the direction of the General Post-Office, and then suddenly turned back. Perhaps Barnes had returned by this time, and she wanted to be there to meet him.

The little flat was still empty, however, and seizing a novel she had bought that day, she tried to forget her anxiety. In vain, however. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and still no one came.

"Where can he be? What can have happened to him?" she asked herself almost feverishly, and then suddenly she heard his voice. Evidently some one was with him. Who could it be?

When Barnes entered the room she started back afraid. There was a look on his face she had never seen before. His eyes were bloodshot, there was a nasty cut on his cheek, while his lips showed signs that they had been bleeding. Still she tried to meet him with a brave face.

"Hello, Jim," she said, "you have come back then. What luck?"

"I'm all right," hiccuped Barnes. "Aren't I, Jenkins?"

"Yes, you're all right," replied Jenkins, who was rather less under the influence of whiskey than his companion.

"How are you, Peg?" went on Barnes. "You haven't been lonely, have you? I tried to come home sooner, but couldn't. Oh, I forgot, this is my friend Jenkins. You don't know Jenkins, do you? He's a white man, white through and through. Bit of a swell, too, in his way. This is my wife, Jenkins."

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Barnes," said Jenkins, evidently trying to appear sober. "If I am not too late I should like to congratulate you. Splendid fellow, your husband. One of the very best. No flies on Barnes."

The girl looked at them both, speechless, and a sense of horror possessed her. In the past she had admitted that Barnes was a little bit gay, without ever realizing what it meant. Now, as she saw his bloodshot eyes and blotched cheeks, she, for the first time, felt the gulf that existed between her father and the man she had married.

"What's the matter, Jim?" she asked. "Have you met with an accident?"

"No, my dear, no accident, but—but—you tell her, Jenkins. My head's a little bit dizzy."

"We've had rather an exciting time, Mrs. Barnes," giggled Jenkins. "We've had an interview with your father."

Peggy hated the thought of this man, a stranger too, being cognizant of her private affairs, but she was eager to know what had taken place. "How did you get on?" she asked. "What did you say?"

"Your father's no gentleman," hiccuped Barnes with drunken gravity. "I'm sorry to say it, Peg, but he's no —no—gentleman," and he had difficulty in enunciating the words. "He wouldn't see anything in a reasonable light, and he insulted me. But I'll pay him out for it! By—by God, I'll pay him out for it!"

"But what happened?" cried the girl. "There is a nasty wound on your face, and your lip is cut open. *What* have you been doing?"

Barnes was evidently trying to collect his thoughts. He was not so much under the influence of drink but that he could see that he was cutting a sorry figure before his newly-made wife. He remembered the promise he had made to her only that day, and as he called to mind the details of his interview with her father, he felt he had not played a very brilliant part. Besides, he was anxious that she should not know the proposal he had made to him.

"Peg," he said solemnly, "I'm disappointed. All my finer feelings are wounded. I don't mind what he said to me so much, but I can't forgive his hard-heartedness to you. He refused to forgive us, Peg, and it nearly broke my heart. It did, straight. That's why I'm afraid I took a drop too much whiskey: I felt downhearted, and I wanted cheering up. How could I help it? I did not mind his insulting me, but how dare he insult you, Peg?"

The girl listened to his meanderings without a word. She looked from the face of one man to that of the other, and something of the degradation of having to do with a drunken man came to her. She almost shuddered; but she was still enamoured of Barnes, and felt angry towards her father.

"What did he say to you, Jim?" she asked. "Tell me all about it."

"It's sickening," said Barnes, solemnly, "just sickening. This is the thanks one gets. Haven't I fought for my country? Haven't I shed my blood for it? And here I have been insulted as though I were a slacker. But I'll not stand it, Peg! Isn't the name of Barnes as good as that of Trelawney? I'll let him know! I'll make him pay for it!"

"Yes, but tell me what happened, Jim. How did you get that nasty place on your face, and that horrible cut on your lip?"

"Oh, that's all right, Peg. I paid him out for that, didn't I, Jenkins? He'll not forget the licking I gave him in a hurry, will he, old man? He'll have to lie in bed for a week."

"Who'll have to lie in bed for a week?" asked Peggy quickly. "My father?"

"No, that whipper-snapper brother of yours. I took it out of him. I've owed it him for a long time. He'll never call me a bounder and a dirty swine again. I knocked all the stuffing out of him. Didn't I, Jenkins?"

"Of course you did," said Jenkins consolingly.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl breathlessly. "Was John there?

"Of course he was," replied Barnes. "The truth was your father was a bit afraid of me, and he brought his upstart son with him to keep up his courage. He didn't dare tackle me himself, so he set on his son to do it. He took a mean advantage of me, too, and got at me before I was ready. That's how I got these marks. But didn't I pay him out for it? Didn't I give him 'fits'? Ask Jenkins."

"That you did, old man," said Jenkins. "He had the licking of his life. Well, I must be going now. Good-night, Mrs. Barnes. I congratulate you again. You've got a white man, through and through. Take it from me, there are no flies on Barnes. Good-night."

He left the room as he spoke, and Peg and Barnes were together.

For some seconds there was a silence between them. The girl did not know what to say, or what to think. She was utterly bewildered by the scene, and although she did not quite realize it at the time, was nauseated at the sight of the man she had chosen to be her husband. She felt helpless, too. Never before had even a suggestion of such a thing happened to her. She supposed that there was some truth in the story of Barnes giving

John a thrashing, and she felt rather glad of it. More than once she had been angry at the contempt which her brother had shown towards him, and now she had a kind of joy that John had been what Barnes had termed "paid out." True, John was only a boy, and while quite as tall as her husband, he was not nearly so big, or strong. That went without saying, and yet there were doubts at the back of her mind. She could not help remembering the look on Jenkins' face when Barnes had spoken to him. But oh, the vulgarity of the thing! What did her father think of it all?

Still she would make the best of it, and with a kind of blind loyalty she turned to the man whom she had married only a few days before.

"Never mind, Jim," she said; "we can do without them."

"Of course we can, old girl," replied the man solemnly. "You shall have your Rolls-Royce yet. All the same, I'm very sad, Peg. He insulted you, he did. I don't care anything about myself, but he insulted *you*. He called you names and said you should never darken his doors again. I think I'll go to bed. I'm not very well. I'm very tired, and I'm wounded in the heart. I'm a bit dizzy, too. Will you help me, Peg?"

She led him into the little bedroom where he, without undressing, threw himself on the bed, and a few seconds later was fast asleep. The girl returned to the sitting-room, and sat for a long time in deadly silence. In her eyes was a look difficult to describe.

The next morning when Barnes awoke he was in an evil humour. His head ached badly and his limbs were sore. As he looked into the glass and saw his discoloured face and cut lip, he muttered savagely. As for Peggy, she had spent a sleepless night, but although she felt utterly miserable, she was wise enough to be silent. She sat with him without a word while he ate his break-

fast, and heaved a sigh of relief when at length the time came for him to go to business.

"I'm a nice sight, aren't I?" he snarled just before he left the flat.

Still the girl did not speak.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked roughly. "Don't look at me like that."

"It's all right, Jim," she said, trying to smile. "We shall both be better presently."

"We need to be. Look here, Peg, we'll have to do something to——" He hesitated as if trying to make up his mind how to say something. Then looking at his watch he gave an exclamation as if of relief. "I must be off," he said. "So long, old girl."

* * * * * * * *

"Mind, Alice, I'm afraid we are not taking a wise step," said Colonel Trelawney a few minutes after their interview with Eleanor.

"I cannot help it, Lester. I feel I must see her—talk to her."

"Yes, I can understand that, but what can we say to her? That man will, of course, have given a garbled story of our meeting last night, and Peggy will be more rebellious than ever. Our interview with Eleanor has been a failure, and it will be worse with her."

"I don't know that it *has* been a failure," replied the mother. "At any rate, I feel we have done what is right. Of course it is all heart-breaking and awful to think about. I know, too, that they have been bad children, and that they have spurned your kindness, but I cannot help it. I *must* see her!"

"But it can lead to no good. Had we not better wait a few days and then *you* go, alone? Don't mistake me, Alice, I think I want to see Peg as badly as you do, but we must try to be wise."

"I have no doubt you are right," admitted the mother, "but I *can't* be wise. I am longing to see my little girl. I know she disobeyed you, and has well-nigh broken our hearts, but I want to see her. I want to be sure she's well. I have been thinking all day about what that man probably said to her, after the scene of last night. You say he was under the influence of drink. May not he have been cruel to her? Oh, my darling, I cannot help it, I *must* see her!"

"Very well," replied the Colonel.

It was with a curious feeling at heart that the Colonel mounted the stairway which led to the place where Peggy had taken up her abode.

Never had he known anything like it before. He scarcely thought of Barnes: him, he could treat with contempt. In spite of all that had taken place he scarcely entered his thoughts, except as a poisonous thing which he must avoid as much as possible. But Peggy was different. It was the thought of her, the helpless little thing which he had kissed soon after her birth, the toddling little mite he had taught to walk, the laughing-eyed maiden whom he had heard say her prayers, that caused his limbs to tremble. What could he do with her and for her? How could he face the problem which stood out in all its ghastly nakedness before him?

Presently they found the number of Peggy's room, and knocked.

The Colonel heard Barnes' voice. "Some one's knocking at the door, Peg. You go.—All right then.—I'm not fit to be seen, but I'll open it."

He opened the door as he spoke, and on seeing who his visitors were, started back in astonishment.

Barnes had evidently done his best to remove all traces of his last night's encounter, and on the whole had been fairly successful. It is true that the court-plaster on his cheek did not improve his appearance, while his left

eye showed unpleasant discolourment. Still he was well dressed and showed no signs of having been drinking. Peggy had done her best to prepare a meal which would be pleasing to him, and had succeeded in doing so. She was at that moment getting dressed in order to go out with her husband.

"I say, Peg," shouted Barnes after he had overcome his astonishment, "here are visitors! Your father and mother have come to see you. Won't you sit down, Colonel? And you, too, Mrs. Trelawney. I'm sure Peggy will be delighted to see you."

He said this in ingratiating tones, because the hope had come into his heart that, in spite of the previous night's happenings, the Colonel had perhaps repented, and had determined to make the best of things. Jenkins had promised never to breathe a word of what had taken place, and Barnes had diligently proclaimed the fact that he had married into one of the oldest and best families in the country. Even yet, he could not understand the Colonel's opposition to him personally, and if, by a stroke of good luck, he could be openly received as the Colonel's son-in-law, he thought it would more than atone for anything he had suffered.

The Colonel did not take the chair which Barnes had indicated, however, while Mrs. Trelawney looked eagerly around the room as if in search of some one.

"Where is Peggy?" she asked.

"In her bedroom dressing, Mrs. Trelawney. I was just going to take her out to a theatre. Peg, your mother's waiting for you."

The man spoke nervously, uneasily, but with an evident desire to please his visitors. Furtively, but eagerly, he scanned the Colonel's face as if trying to discover signs of relenting.

"Ah, there you are, Peg," he went on as the girl entered the room. "This is a surprise for you, isn't it?

Colonel, can't I offer you some refreshment? Let me get you a whiskey and soda."

As far as the Colonel was concerned, Barnes might never have spoken. He took no notice of him whatever, but kept his eyes fixed on his daughter. He did not speak, however.

Mrs. Trelawney, on the other hand, rushed towards her girl, and kissed her.

"Oh, Peg, my darling!" she sobbed.

"Hello, Mother," and although her voice was somewhat unnatural, Peggy tried to assume her old defiant attitude. "So you have found us out then?"

"Of course we have," replied the mother. "How could we do otherwise?"

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't think you would. Of course I have been a naughty girl, and so I thought I should be crossed off the book of your remembrance." She spoke flippantly, almost insolently.

"But, Peg, my darling," pleaded the mother, "you knew we should want to know where you were. How could you?"

"How could I what?"

"Why—why this," and the mother looked around the room.

"I can't help it if you are not pleased," and she still kept up her defiant tones. "I told you I should do it."

"Come, come, Peg," pleaded Barnes, "that's not the way to treat your mother. Of course we loved each other, and we got married in a hurry. Perhaps we were not wise, but we acted in love, and—and anybody could forgive that," and again Barnes gave the Colonel a covert glance.

But Peggy was not in the mood to be amiable. She remembered Barnes' description of his interview with her father on the previous night, and she felt angry and rebellious. She was ashamed, too, that her parents

should see the kind of home to which Barnes had brought her: but she was too proud to confess it, even to herself. She wanted them to believe she was proud of what she had done—that she was justified in her action.

"It's no use your coming here to cry over me, Mother," she went on. "You know what Father said to me, and—and I told you what I should do. Well, I've done it, and I would do it again. What right had he to interfere with me?"

"Is that all you have to say, Peggy?" asked the mother sorrowfully.

"What else is there to say?" retorted the girl. "Of course in a way I am sorry I had to leave *you,* and if *he* had not come home," she looked towards her father as she spoke, "things might have been different."

"Then you don't care about breaking our hearts?" said the mother a little unwisely.

"Oh, don't talk tosh," replied Peggy flippantly. "As I have said, I am sorry for *you,* Mother, but you'll get over it. As for *him,*" and again she looked towards her father, "I don't see what he has to bother about."

"Come now, Peg," Barnes broke in, "let bygones be bygones. We know your father tried to stop the course of true love, and he couldn't; we were too fond of each other for that. All the same, I understand his feelings. He's a bit upset. But now he's come to see us, let's talk over things quietly, and make the best of everything. I'm open to reason, and although I know I have a bit of a temper, hard words never do any good."

All this time the Colonel had remained silent. The scene was, to him, distressing beyond words, and for the moment Peggy did not seem like his own child at all. The little maid he had loved and fondled years before had ceased to be, and in her place had come this rebellious girl who had not a spark of affection for him. As for Barnes, the more he saw of him, the greater was

his contempt. He saw his cunning in every look, realized it in every word he spoke.

"But your father loves you, Peggy," said Mrs. Trelawney. "He has come here to tell you so."

"What's the good of that story?" asked the girl. "Ever since he came home he has treated me as though I had no will of my own, and no life of my own. He seems to think that because I am young, I should have no word to say about my own future. Well, I have let him know that he's wrong. What does he know about girls, or about girls' feelings? And what right had he to interfere with me?" She still kept to her defiant attitude, and although she spoke in the third person she was evidently asking her father to answer her.

"Evidently," said the Colonel, speaking for the first time, "you have decided that I have no right to come here, no right to interfere. Evidently, too, you think you know better than I as to what is good for you, and you have acted on your own judgment rather than on mine. That being so, I have no more to say about it. I have only this to tell you, Peggy, although you admit you have no affection for me, I cannot help loving you. Even yet, you are my child."

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Trelawney, "and our home is still your home, Peg."

"What's the use of saying that, Mother, when you know he won't have it so? Will he let me bring home Jim? I have married the man I love. Will he let me bring him home as my husband?"

"That's it, old girl," assented Barnes. "You've hit the nail on the head there. That's what I call the 'acid test.' I have done the straight thing. I never asked Peg a word about what dowry she would have, or anything of that sort. I might have married money and have been helped to make a home, and set up in business. But I didn't do it. I followed my heart, and married the girl

I loved. Now then, Colonel, you insulted me last night, do the straight thing now."

The Colonel gave Barnes a glance of contempt, and then turned to his wife. "I don't think we can do any good by staying here longer, Alice," he said. "Let us go home. Good-night, Peggy. You don't believe it now, but the time will come when you'll know I acted for the best, and that in spite of everything, you are very dear to me. I want you to remember that—always."

He took his wife's arm as he spoke and drew her towards the door, as though the interview was ended, but evidently this was not according to Barnes' ideas.

"But I say, Colonel," protested that gentleman, "surely you aren't going away like that! I have married your daughter, and I think now you're here we might come to some arrangement. It's no use being huffy about it, and we can't live at daggers drawn all our lives. I've done the straight thing, and I think you ought to do ditto."

The man's words, and the evident meaning behind them, almost caused the Colonel to lose control over himself. And not only that: The fact that his child should have chosen to marry such a creature made him ashamed. For the moment he was on the point of telling her what Barnes had said to him on the previous night: of making it known to her that the fellow had offered her the grossest insult a man can offer to a woman. But he checked himself. After all, they were married, and he would do nothing to destroy any possibility of their being happy.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" persisted Barnes.

"No," replied the Colonel.

Evidently the contempt in his tones reached Barnes, for he broke out angrily: "Then what's the use of your coming here?" he shouted with an oath. "I'm not good enough for you, aren't I? You won't acknowledge me,

won't you? Well, we shall see. Let me tell you this, my lord-high-and-mighty, I'm as good as any Trelawney that ever lived."

"I have nothing to say to you, except this," the Colonel still spoke in quiet tones, "I have told Peggy that she's very dear to me: and that is true. That's why I repeat what my boy said to you last night after he had thrashed you, and it will be well for you to remember it. If you do not treat her kindly,—then you may expect trouble. As for acknowledging you in any way, or admitting you into my house——" The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, and opened the door.

"Yes, and let me tell *you* this," shouted Barnes, "you're in my house now, and I'll stand no insults from any one. If you don't clear out, I'll kick you out. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it. We're no longer in the army, remember that!"

"I'm afraid you were right, Lester," said Mrs. Trelawney when they had reached the street. "I'm afraid we ought not to have gone."

"I'm not sure, Alice," replied the Colonel. "But heavens! how my fingers did itch to thrash him!"

CHAPTER XX

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

THE Colonel and his wife were sitting alone together in their house at Hampstead. John, although it was getting late, had not yet returned. The servants had gone to bed, and the house was very silent.

"Thank God we've each other, darling," said Mrs. Trelawney, nestling close to her husband.

"Yes, we have each other," replied the Colonel,—"and John," he added. "I wonder why the boy is so late."

"I knew he would be late," replied Mrs. Trelawney. "He told me so. Mr. Davenport has asked him to his house to-night. He wanted to talk with him about his invention."

"John's a grand boy, Alice. He atones for a good deal."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trelawney with a sigh, "and to think that—but that's John's voice in the hall now. He has some one with him. I wonder who it is?"

"Hello, Dad," cried John as he entered the room. "Here's Rod Ravenscroft. I met him just now as I was crossing the Heath, and made him come in."

"Rod, my boy," said the Colonel heartily, "I'm glad to see you. You're quite a stranger."

"Yes," replied Ravenscroft, somewhat awkwardly. "I've been away. You see I practise on the Northern Circuit, and I have had some cases at Manchester."

"And won them?" laughed the Colonel.

"I did very well, sir, thank you," replied the young barrister.

"Plenty of briefs?"

"Oh, they're coming in fairly well. Although I could do with more. Still I mustn't grumble. Dad tells me that my success is almost phenomenal."

Ravenscroft could not help being rather restrained in his manner. He remembered what he had said to the Colonel when he was there last, and he had heard what had happened since. So far, the affair had not become a matter of common gossip, but Ravenscroft had been informed that Peggy had been married to Barnes, and that Eleanor no longer lived in her father's house. The Colonel, too, felt sensitive. He wondered how much the young man knew, and bearing in mind Ravenscroft's hopes in relation to Eleanor, he decided to speak freely.

"The girls are not here," he said. "Do you know why?"

"I suppose so, sir. I'm very sorry."

"Perhaps I ought to explain to you fully," said the Colonel.

"Please don't, sir,—if—if it pains you. I know how you must feel, and—and I'm not altogether surprised."

"No? You knew something then?"

"Nothing definite, sir."

Both John and Mrs. Trelawney had for the moment left the room, and Ravenscroft went on nervously:

"I met Miss Trelawney shortly after I was here last, sir. I went very near making a declaration: but I—I didn't quite."

"No?"

"No, sir. I dare say I was very foolish, but I couldn't help telling Miss Trelawney what I thought of her friend, —that woman Cory. I couldn't believe she *was* her friend, and I asked her if she agreed with what the creature said."

"Thank you, sir, and I shall be glad to come. I'm awfully fond of her still, sir. In fact I have had rather a bad time over the matter. It's not only because she doesn't care for me, but somehow it has altered my ideas of women."

The Colonel was silent.

"You see," went on Ravenscroft, "I have a kind of belief that when a man ceases to idealize women he is very much poorer,—morally, I mean. I suppose I'm pretty much like other young fellows, and have all sorts of temptations, but I've tried to keep straight. In fact, as I told you, I *have* kept straight. I think I idealized Eleanor, and it helped me. But when I heard her listen with approval to what Tamsin Cory said, and when she told me that the woman was her dearest friend, my ideal seemed to be shattered. I don't know if you understand, sir?"

"Yes, I understand. As you may well imagine, the whole thing is bitter to me—God only knows *how* bitter. But after all, I hope it's only a phase. The girl is simply caught up with the tide of feeling that is sweeping the country. I believe that down deep in her heart she despises such women as Tamsin Cory, and all her sayings and doings."

Ravenscroft was silent for a few seconds. "I hope I'm not narrow or unreasonable," he then said. "And of course, like every other fellow who has been in the army, I have had a shaking up these last few years past, but I have always held old-fashioned views about women. You see my mother has been a great deal to me, sir, and I simply couldn't think of her smoking and drinking liquors, and talking like so many of the girls of to-day talk. Of course there may be no harm in these things; yet I don't like them."

"No," replied the Colonel, "neither do I. And yet these things have their meaning. They are symptoms."

"Symptoms of what?" asked Ravenscroft.

"Symptoms of the spirit of the age; and it's not a good spirit. There are thousands of girls, I suppose, whom this kind of thing doesn't affect either one way or the other: but what troubles me is that they are symptoms of the general lowering of moral standards. We may sneer at the Puritanism of the past, and say that it was accompanied by great hypocrisy, but from what I can gather it was infinitely better than the immodesty of to-day, which is naked and unashamed. It's seen in the women's dress. It is seen in the things they delight in, the jokes they laugh at, the kind of books they revel in, their general attitude towards sexual morality, their disregard of religion."

"Do you know where Eleanor is now, sir?" said Ravenscroft suddenly. "Forgive me for asking."

"Yes, I saw her to-night. She shares a flat with another girl. She has obtained a situation in the city. She earns her own living. Mark you I admire that, and would gladly support her in it, but—but as to the rest —— Good-night, Ravenscroft, I'll go back now."

"A fine lad," reflected the Colonel as he made his way homeward. "It's hit him hard, that's plain enough. I should have liked him for a son-in-law, too, and have been proud of him. But of course he wouldn't marry Eleanor now, even if she'd have him. I know I wouldn't, were I in his place. What kind of wife would she make him! But the tragedy of it all! Great God, the tragedy of it all!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE "GOOD FRIEND"

"WELL, Eleanor, I hear that your father has become more than ever distinguished. Don't you feel exalted?"

"Why should I?"

"Oh, after all, it's a great thing to be a General's daughter. I hear he's going to be knighted, too. Then you'll be able to refer to your father as Sir Lester Trelawney with a lot of letters after his name, while your mother will be Lady Trelawney. Have you written congratulating him?"

"No, of course not."

"I think I should. After all it may not be wise to go too far. Of course I admire your independence and your determination not to knuckle down to him. All the same I think if I had a father who had distinguished himself as your father has, I should keep on the right side of him. Naturally I should go along on my own lines, but there would be no harm in being civil."

"I don't think it would do any good now," replied Eleanor.

"Why?"

"Oh, I haven't seen him, nor heard from him for several months. I fancy he has crossed me off his books altogether."

"Has he told you so?"

"No. It's all the other way, I suppose. But I told him, as I told my brother, that I preferred to be without them. I expect they've given me up."

"And yet he was awfully cut-up when you left home. I know that, because he came to the Amazon Club and tried to find out where you were. He and your brother came asking for my address. I knew he didn't want to know anything about me: it was only that he might discover your whereabouts. But he came here, didn't he?"

"Yes," replied Eleanor. "He brought Mother some days after I left home."

"And he got no change out of you?"

"No," replied the girl. "I told him flatly that I was going my own way."

"And quite right, too. I say, old girl, have you got a drop of whiskey here? I'm as dry as a lime kiln."

They were seated in Eleanor's room in St. Hildebrand's Mansions. There were four of them—Eleanor, the girl who occupied the rooms with her, whose name was Ellen Chellew, Tamsin Cory, and another named Edith Jeffreys. Earlier in the evening, the four had dined at the Amazon Club, and after visiting a vaudeville show, had returned to Eleanor's flat in order to have a chat before turning in. It was not often that they went out in this way. Generally they had male friends who accompanied them to whatever place of amusement they went to, and often to supper afterwards: but to-night, as they declared, they were "on their own."

"I have some whiskey," said Eleanor. "I remembered the straafing you gave me for not having any the last time you were here, so I bought a bottle. I don't touch it myself, as you know."

"Why not?" laughed Tamsin. "A good stiff nightcap helps one to sleep. I say," she went on after whiskey and glasses had been set on the table, "is it true that Mr. Wakeham has been paying you special attentions?"

"No," replied the girl. "He has been civil, but nothing more."

"Oh, you needn't be so touchy about it. Why shouldn't he?"

"For the simple reason that he's married," replied Eleanor.

"As though that went for anything, in these days!" laughed Tamsin. "Have a cig, you girls?" producing her cigarette case as she spoke. A few minutes later, the little apartment was filled with smoke.

"But you have been out to supper with him," cried Edith Jeffreys, between the puffs of her cigarette. "I saw you with him at the Orient myself—late at night, too. Did he take you home?"

"No," replied the girl. She spoke rather sharply, and in spite of herself could not repress the flush which came to her cheeks. "I'm not that sort," she went on. "In fact, that kind of thing makes no appeal to me. If I weren't fond of dancing, and music, I think I'd go in for public work."

"Public work?" said Ellen Chellew. "What kind of public work?"

"Oh, the Independence of Ireland, or, for that matter, a general revolution. I was talking with a Russian the other night, and he asked me whether I would do some propaganda work. It would be great fun."

"Did you consent?"

"Not quite. I was tempted, though. He offered me a good salary. But I should have to work jolly hard, and I should have no time of my own. I should have to sell myself body and soul to some committee or other, and that wouldn't do for me."

"Besides, a revolution would never succeed in England," said Edith Jeffreys. "We're too blanked respectable, too fossilized. Not but what I would like to see one. Wouldn't it be fun to have the whole of our so-called civilization smashed up! I'd give something to see Downing Street occupied by men of the Krassin

stamp, and the House of Lords in the hands of revolutionaries. And better fun still to see our 'Pukka' Generals and Colonels doing the goose-step to the commands of Trotsky. I say, have you read that book by that Tomkins woman?"

"Who's she?"

"Oh, a social democrat who went to Russia. She says that the old aristocracy of Russia have been turned out of their big castles, and are now begging bread and sweeping the streets. Wouldn't I like to see that here! Fancy General Lester Trelawney acting as office boy to Eleanor."

"And is her opinion favourable to the Russian revolution?" asked Tamsin.

"Not very. She's old-fashioned, you know, although she pretends to be a socialist. Says she's a Christian and all that sort of rot."

"What I like about the Russian stunt," said Tamsin, "is that it knocked all the old religious ideas into smithereens. I hear that among the intellectuals marriage simply doesn't exist: they practise absolute freedom. In England, now, we haven't broken away from the traditions of the old-time nursery."

"Oh, but we have," cried Edith Jeffreys, who was on the staff of the *Workers' Record*. "What thinking man or woman pays any attention to the Ten Commandments now? Who thinks any the less of a woman in these days because she doesn't keep her marriage vows? I don't. By the way, Eleanor, what are you going to do when Ellen leaves you?"

"When Ellen leaves me? I don't understand you."

"Haven't you told her, Ellen?"

"Not yet," replied Ellen Chellew.

"What is there to tell?"

"Oh, she's going to try the grand experiment like the rest."

"But," and Eleanor looked round the room uneasily, "I don't understand. I thought Ellen was a religious girl."

"Me religious!" and Ellen laughed scornfully. "I gave that up long ago."

"Of course she did," said Tamsin. "Your father was a clergyman, wasn't he, Ellen?"

"Yes. I was brought up in a country vicarage. Things were very strict with me, and when I began to know what was what, I kicked over the traces. Of course, I had an awful time. You see, Dad was a good sort in his way, but frightfully narrow. Why, we even had family prayers in the house!" At this there was laughter. "After a while," she went on, "I went to visit a cousin who lived in Plymouth, and that opened my eyes. When I returned home I got restless and began to tear up things generally. Then there was —— to pay. Dad began to preach to me, and to tell me what my duties were. I wouldn't stand it, so it ended in my running away from home, and getting a Government job. I kept pretty straight for a time, and being desirous of showing my father what I could do, I learnt stenography and shorthand. That enabled me to get the job I have now."

"And now you shake a loose leg?" laughed Tamsin.

"I don't say that," replied the girl, and there was a look in her eyes difficult to interpret. "You see," she went on, "it's a bit lonely here sometimes and Eleanor is so frightfully straight-laced."

"I, straight-laced?" Eleanor laughed scornfully.

"Yes,—you know you are. You're cold-blooded and calculating. I'm not. I hunger for enjoyment and life, and I mean to have it. One can be young but once. There was a curate who wanted to marry me when I was at home. But fancy being a curate's wife.—In fact, fancy being a wife at all. I should go mad if I had to settle down to household drudgery."

"But," put in Eleanor anxiously, "I thought that you were going to marry that man Dingle who has come home with you several times."

"My dear girl," laughed Ellen Chellew, "you can't do here what they can in Russia. Bigamy is a capital crime. George Dingle may not live with his wife, but he's a married man all the same. Still it's a big risk," she added, "and we women have to think of old age."

After her friends left her that night, and Ellen Chellew had gone to bed, Eleanor Trelawney did a little hard thinking. She reviewed her life since she had left home, and wondered whether, after all, she had acted wisely. To be sure, she had rebelled against what she called the absurd restrictions of home, and she grew angry at the thought of what her father had said to her. Nevertheless, she missed the refinements of home life, and realized that there was something beautiful in the atmosphere which had surrounded her childhood. She would not in the slightest degree admit that she was wrong in what she had done; yet, in a way she could not understand, she felt that there was now something missing from her life.

Where was Rod Ravenscroft? she wondered. Did he ever think of her now? She called to mind the evening she had walked with him across Hampstead Heath, and she felt sure that he had been on the point of proposing marriage to her. Of course she would not think of marrying him, or anybody. She was not a domestic animal, and would go mad if she were tied down to the drudgery of a housewife: but she admired Rod for all that. He was very honourable, very chivalrous. He was good-looking, too, and clever. In all probability he, like his father, would become a well-known barrister. Perhaps he would go into Parliament, and become famous. Yes, she admired Rod greatly, and wondered whether he

had heard of what she had done, and what he thought about it.

Then her thoughts flew back to her home again, and she remembered what Tamsin Cory had said about the honour which had been conferred upon her father. He was General Trelawney now, and would, in all probability, be knighted. After all, he was a father to be proud of. Of course she still rebelled against his attitude, and was glad that she had demanded her freedom, but she could not help sighing as she thought about him. Then there was her mother. She was fond of her mother in spite of her weakness, and her notions, and felt a stab in her heart as she thought of the pain she and Peg had caused her.

What a fool Peg had been to marry that fellow Barnes! She had seen but little of her lately, and Peg seemed sullen and ill humoured whenever she had called to see her. There had been certain signs, too, that Peg was not happy, although too proud to admit it. She wondered whether Barnes treated her kindly, and whether things were going well with them. Peg had hinted that their flat was very dear, and that they would possibly have to go to one less expensive. "I'd better go to bed," she thought presently, "or I shan't be fit for work tomorrow. And what's the use of worrying about these things! They're done now, and I couldn't stand having my liberties restricted."

"Well, Miss Trelaweny," said Mr. Wakeham when she arrived at business the next morning, "you look rather pale. Aren't you well?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"That's right. You mustn't get ill, you know. I couldn't bear the idea of my little secretary losing her bloom. Where were you last night, eh?"

"At the Empire," she replied.

"Naughty, naughty! A bad place for a little girl like

you to go without a proper escort. Who went with you?"

"I went with three other girls," replied Eleanor.

"Come now, you don't expect me to believe that, do you?"

"Believe it or not, it's true."

"But some gentlemen friends went along, of course?"

"No," replied Eleanor.

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun."

"Ah, I breathe again. When are *we* going out together again?"

"I had never thought of it," replied the girl. "Of course it's very kind of you to suggest it."

"Not a bit of it," replied Mr. Wakeham. "I dearly love to take you out. When shall we say? Next Saturday?"

"It would be delightful."

"That's good. But where?"

"I should like to see the new play at the Haymarket."

"Oh, that's too tame. What do you say to a vaudeville show, with a little supper and dance afterwards?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Wakeham, I don't think I would care to."

"But why not? You're young, and a stodgy play won't amuse you. I'm a member of a nice little club where ladies are admitted, and of course I'll be there to look after you. You can get one of your friends to come with you if you like. What about Miss Chellew and her friend Mr. Dingle?"

"Thank you," replied Eleanor, "but I'm afraid I could not. Isn't it time for us to get to work? I see you have a big pile of letters there."

"Well, speak to Miss Chellew and let me know tomorrow," and Mr. Wakeham turned rather uneasily to the pile of letters before him.

For an hour he dictated letters.

"You'll get them done quickly, won't you?" he said as he finished dictating the last.

"They'll take me a couple of hours at least," she replied.

"Oh, well, get them off as soon as you can." He went to the door as he spoke and took his hat. Then he stopped suddenly. "Oh, I'm afraid I have something unpleasant to say to you, Miss Trelawney," he said.

"Unpleasant, Mr. Wakeham?"

"Well, yes. I'm afraid you'll have to get another situation."

"Why? Don't I give you satisfaction? Don't I do my work well?"

"Oh, yes. It's not that at all. You are simply splendid, but," he came back to the desk again and stood there. "The truth is," he said, "business is pretty bad just now, and there's a big slump all round. I was talking with the directors yesterday, and they informed me that we shall have to cut down expenses. But I suppose that was to be expected. Of course we've had a big boom, but now we are in for a bad time, and—and well, you see, Miss Trelawney, you have been a little bit of a luxury, haven't you?"

"I hope not," she replied, uneasily.

"It's very difficult for me to talk about it," went on Mr. Wakeham. "But, of course, a little time ago secretaries were at a premium. The army had not been demobilized, and we hardly knew how to get our work done: now it's all the other way. One can get typists by the score. However, don't trouble, Miss Trelawney, I'll see you're all right. I've been a very good friend to you, haven't I?"

"You have, indeed," she replied, looking at his face wonderingly.

"And you have been a very good little girl, I'll say

that. And mind, whatever happens, we must continue to be friends, Miss Trelawney. If the directors say they can't keep you, I'll see that *you're* all right."

"You mean you'll get me another place?"

"I don't know about that. Places with anything like a decent salary are difficult for girls to get now. Anyway, don't disappoint me about Saturday. I must be off now," and Mr. Wakeham hurriedly left the room.

Eleanor felt greatly depressed as she endeavoured to settle down to her work. She was far from easy in her mind. In spite of the liberal salary Mr. Wakeham reminded her she was receiving, she could barely pay her way. Up to now, she had managed comfortably chiefly because she had brought a fairly large amount of money from home. She had saved a good part of the salary she had received while she worked for the Government, and had not spent the whole of her dress allowance. But this was nearly all gone now, and she did not know what she should do if she had to fill another position at a lower salary. Still it might not be so bad as she feared, and although her heart was heavy she turned to her notebook and began her work.

When she reached St. Hildebrand's Mansions that night she found Ellen Chellew had already arrived, and noticed that the girl seemed very excited.

"George will be here soon," she informed her.

"George who?"

"Why, George Dingle, of course—*my* George."

"Look here, Ellen," and Eleanor's face became very grave, "do you realize what you are doing?"

"Of course I do. I'm going to enjoy myself. We're going to the Frivolity to see the new show there, and then we are going to the Orient for supper. Don't you envy me? What are you going to do with *yourself?*"

A feeling of loneliness swept over Eleanor. She had made no plans for the evening, and the thought of sitting

alone was almost unbearable. She reflected that if what Mr. Wakeham had told her were true, she would have to save her money, and she could not afford to go to a place of amusement that night. Besides, even if she could, the thought of going alone was anything but pleasant. Something akin to frenzy crept into her heart. She had been working very hard all day, and was nervous, and irritable. She felt envious, too. Why should Ellen Chellew be able to go to the Frivolity and the Orient, while she stayed alone? There was no need for it either. If she were not what her friends termed so straight-laced, she —— She drove the thought from her mind, however, and felt a shudder pass over her. Still —— "All right, Ellen," she laughed, "I hope you'll have a good time. By the way, what are you doing on Saturday?"

"I have nothing arranged, yet. Why?"

"Mr. Wakeham asked me to go with him to the Friv, and then to a supper, and dance afterwards."

Ellen laughed loudly. "You are going it, my dear."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Because Mr. Wakeham suggested that you and Mr. Dingle should go, too."

"Did he? I'll ask George. He's an awfully good sport—ready for anything like that. I'll let you know in the morning."

When her friend had left her, Eleanor felt more desolate than ever. Never had the flat seemed so dull and dingy, nor life so slow and worthless. After all, what was there to live for? What did the future offer her? She had decided that no woman with self-respect would tie herself, by lifelong vows, to any man, to become his chattel, the mother of his children, his house drudge. But what was there, else? If only some career lay before her!

She thought of some of the women she had met at the Amazon Club. One of them was the sub-editor of a great newspaper, and earning several hundreds a year, met important people, and whose life was full of excitement. She would go and see her. No, she wouldn't. She did not feel like going to the Amazon Club that night. Besides, this Mrs. Brashaw was one of the most pessimistic women she ever met. She was sour, too, and unhappy in spite of her career. There was Tamsin Cory, her best friend. Tamsin was associated with several so-called advanced journals and regarded as being in the swim of things: but would she like to become like Tamsin? She had not noticed it at first, but Tamsin was often quite coarse, and always a little common.

But she had her liberty! Yes, she was free from everything like restrictions, and she was earning her own living. But how precarious everything was! Mr. Wakeham had told her only that day that she might lose her place. What should she do if she did? This little flat, shabby as it was, was frightfully dear, and if Ellen Chellew did not share the expenses she could not live there. But even if she could, what then? In a few years her youth would be gone, and her good looks faded. What had she to fall back upon? What prospects had she?

Of course she would not think of going back to Hampstead. She would suffer any fate rather than that. Fancy, after all she had said, to go back at the end of a few months and ask to be reinstated in her home! No, she positively could not bear the thought of settling down to the monotony of her former home life.

She started to her feet. "I simply cannot stay here alone," she cried aloud. "I simply can't! I must go out somewhere."

It wanted an hour to sunset, and the evening was warm. Where should she go? Without any definite des-

tination in mind she found her way into Holborn. "I'll have a ride to Hyde Park," she thought. "That's what life amounts to for me, a twopenny 'bus ride." A minute later she was being swept along the great thoroughfare. The sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians, the street thronged with traffic. For the most part the people were laughing and talking, but she was alone. She wished she had not come out at all. Why could she not have gone to see Peg instead? She had not seen her for several days, and a chat with her sister might, perhaps, cheer her up. No, that would not do; Barnes might be with Peg, and she could not stand Barnes.

When she came to Tottenham Court Road, there was a great congestion of traffic, and her 'bus was held up. She sat still a few seconds, looking at the whirlpool of traffic, and then, acting upon impulse, and scarcely knowing what she was doing, she left the 'bus, and made her way to the Hampstead Subway. A minute later she found herself in a train which was going in the direction of her own home. When she arrived at Hampstead she left the train almost by instinct, and hurried towards the elevator.

Why was her heart beating so rapidly? She was not going home. She would rather die than do such a thing. Nevertheless, she felt excited beyond words.

Presently she reached the Heath. Yes, it was better here. The air was purer, and there was a suggestion of country. Children were shouting in their play, lovers were strolling, arm in arm.

She was startled at hearing her own name. "Miss Trelawney," said a voice, and turning she saw a girl who, months before, had been pointed out to her as Jim Barnes' sister. "Forgive me for speaking to you, but I thought you would not mind. You remember me, don't you? I'm Emily Barnes. Are you living at home now?"

"No."

"Oh, I thought you might be, seeing you up here on the Heath. Jim told me you couldn't stand the old man's temper, so had gone off on your own. Have you seen Jim lately?"

"No."

"Oh, for shame! You ought not to neglect your relations, you know," and the girl giggled as she spoke. "Do you mind my walking with you? It was a bit stuffy at home, so I just came up here for a breath of fresh air. It's easy to get here by the subway from Camden Town."

"Of course, you can walk with me if you like."

"I have wanted to see you for a long time," and Emily Barnes spoke confidentially. "You see, Eleanor,—you don't mind my calling you Eleanor, do you, for of course we're kind of sisters, aren't we? But as I was saying, I wanted to speak to you. I'm not comfortable in my mind about Jim and Peg."

"No? Anything the matter?"

"I'm not sure. Jim was up at our house two nights ago, and he was very glum. He says he's going to get the sack."

"The sack! What do you mean?"

"Oh, there's a slump in the real estate business, as there is in everything else, and his boss says that he'll have to discharge some of his men, and he gave Jim a hint that he might have to go. Jim's awfully proud, you know, and I fancy he's been a bit cheeky."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yes. Well, there it is. That's the thanks soldiers get for defending their country. It's only the big-wigs that get taken care of. Oh, I forgot to congratulate you; your father's been made a General, I hear. And that leads me to what I was going to say. I don't think your father's acted like a gentleman at all. Oh, I don't mince words, I say straight what I mean."

"How hasn't he acted like a gentleman?"

"The way he's treated Jim. Jim asked him fair to let bygones be bygones, but your father wouldn't even speak to him. Nasty, uppish pride, I call it. I say he ought to make Peg an allowance. A hundred or two a year would be nothing to him. Why can't he be reasonable and let the two families be friendly? If he doesn't, from what I can hear, Jim will have to bring Peg home to Camden Town, and we don't want that. Mother's got enough to do to keep the house straight as it is, and what should we do with Jim home and Peg, with her high and mighty ways? And I shouldn't be at all surprised if there isn't a squalling brat presently. I told him I wouldn't stand for it."

Eleanor felt as though she could have screamed. Her nerves seemed raw, and the thought of being associated with this common girl, and the rest of the Barnes family, was horrible. "I must go and see Peg," she managed to say. "Perhaps things are not so bad as you think."

"Well, I shouldn't say they were very good. I don't want to say anything against your sister, but she is extravagant, and never seems happy unless she's either off to a show or a dance. Jim says she won't go to the movies, they're not good enough for her. I give you fair warning, Jim won't stand too much nonsense, and if something isn't done, there'll be ructions. You, Eleanor, I think, might help them."

Eleanor writhed as she heard the girl calling her by name, and had difficulty in controlling herself. "How can I help them?" she asked rather sharply. "I have to work for my own living, and have only a small salary."

"Oh, tell that to the Marines."

"But I haven't."

"That won't do. Here you are, living on your own with another girl in a flat. I've heard all about it. Miss Chellew has her fine clothes and jewelry, and goes to

expensive places of amusement. Does she do it on her salary? Don't tell me," and the girl laughed knowingly.

A flush of shame passed over Eleanor's cheeks. "I have nothing to do with what Miss Chellew does," she said angrily.

"Oh, haven't you?" Miss Barnes laughed incredulously. "But a friend of mine saw you at the 'Orient,' not so long ago. You were there with a gentleman, drinking champagne. Does that come out of a typist's salary? Don't tell me! You can help Peg if you like, and I think you're mean if you don't. Jim knows all about Mr. Wakeham. He's no plaster of Paris saint, and would never get mistaken for a preacher."

The girl's evident meaning drove Eleanor Trelawney nearly mad. "Miss Barnes," she said, as her voice trembled, "I came here to be alone. Would you mind telling me which way you are going?"

"What do you want to know that for?"

"Because I'll go in the opposite direction."

"Oh, you will, will you? I suppose that although my brother's married your sister, I'm not good enough to walk with you. But let me tell you this, Miss, I'm as good as you are, and I don't go to fast restaurants with married men."

Eleanor looked around her helplessly, and as she did so, she wished the ground would swallow her up. Close beside her, so near that he could not have helped hearing what was said, was Rod Ravenscroft. By his side was a handsome, well-dressed girl whom she had never seen before, but whoever she was, it was easy for Eleanor to recognize her as belonging to that class of people with whom she, herself, formerly associated.

Ravenscroft lifted his hat and passed on without a word, but Eleanor saw the expression in his eyes. He must have heard what the girl had said, and have understood the *significance* of her words. Never had she

felt so humiliated. What must he think? What must the girl by his side think? Possibly they were talking about her now. Probably he was telling her that she was the daughter of General Trelawney.

She rushed away while the girl Barnes laughed aloud: —jeeringly, tauntingly. Whither she was going she did not know, did not care. Oh, it was horrible, horrible! Presently she had time to think over what had taken place, but it was not of what Emily Barnes had told her about Peg that filled her mind. Who was this girl who was out walking with Rod Ravenscroft? What were they to each other? Was she his *fiancée?* She must get away! It did not matter where, except that she must get away, as far from Hampstead as possible.

Half an hour later she was back in her shabby little room again, recalling every incident of what had taken place since she left. Her brain seemed on fire. To think that she, Eleanor Trelawney, daughter of General Trelawney, should be spoken to in such a way by this common woman. And then there was the trouble about Peg. Her sister would go mad if she had to live with the Barnes family. How could she bear being in constant association with Jim Barnes' mother and his two sisters? And the worst of it was she, Eleanor, could not help her. Her own position was insecure. She might lose her place at any time, and what then? She called to mind Mr. Wakeham's words. She remembered the looks he had given her. What did he mean by the insinuations he had thrown out? In a way, he had always been respectful to her, yet——

Hour after hour she sat thinking. She did not heed the lapse of time, and presently, when she heard Ellen Chellew's voice, she seemed like one awakened out of an awful dream.

"Won't you come in, George?"

"Not to-night, girlie. Oh, well, then, just for a min-

ute. How do you do, Miss Trelawney? Sitting here alone? Now, that's downright sinful. You ought to be out enjoying yourself. Nell and I have had a jolly time. By the way, I'm good for Saturday night, so we'll regard that as settled. Now, I must go. Good-night, Miss Trelawney. Good-night, Nell, my pet bird, give us another kiss." The man's voice sounded thick, as though he had been drinking more than was good for him.

"We've had a glorious time!" exclaimed Ellen after he had gone. "The Revue was splendid, and George and I drank a whole magnum of champagne! We *will* have a time on Saturday night!"

"I don't think I shall go," said Eleanor.

"Oh, but you must. It's settled. George said he would ring up Mr. Wakeham to-morrow and fix it up, so you can't back out now. Besides, what's the odds? Let's enjoy ourselves while we can."

When Eleanor arrived at the office next morning, Mr. Wakeham was not there, for which fact she was much relieved. She did not know why, but she seemed to be standing on the brink of an awful chasm. Her troubles seemed to have come upon her all at once. What should she do if she lost her position? How could she meet the future, and how could she help Peg? Was there any truth in what Emily Barnes had said? As for Rod Ravenscroft, she had driven him out of her mind, at least she thought she had. What was he to her? She had told him that the very idea of marriage was nauseating to her, and he,—of course, he had forgotten her, and if he had become fond of some other girl what was that to her?

When Mr. Wakeham came to the office about eleven o'clock, she was uneasy at the look he gave her, and the way he spoke.

"Well, it's all right about Saturday, isn't it?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I cannot go, Mr. Wakeham. It's very kind of you, but I don't think I could manage it."

"Oh, but you must. Why, it's settled. I saw Dingle a few minutes ago, and he told me you had consented, so I've booked seats. You can't back out now, you know."

"I'm afraid I must, Mr. Wakeham. By the way, I hope what you told me yesterday about—about my losing my situation here isn't true."

"I'm afraid it is," replied Mr. Wakeham, "yes, I'm afraid it is. But don't trouble your little head about *that*. I'm not going to leave my little friend in the lurch. I haven't time to talk with you about it now, though. I can on Saturday. We'll find some quiet corner and then I'll tell you."

"Do you mean that you can find me another place?" she asked eagerly.

"I think I've got it all mapped out," he evaded: "but there must be no backing out, you know. And by the way, I'm just off to Birmingham, and shan't be back until Saturday. However, it's all right, the seats are all booked and I'll call at your place about seven o'clock." He took a step nearer to her as if to say something else, then apparently thought better of it, and left the room.

During the next two days, Eleanor was in a state of mind difficult to describe. But when the evening of Saturday came she had evidently come to a decision.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NIGHT CLUB AFFAIR

THAT decision was that she had resolved to accept Mr. Wakeham's invitation. She felt rather nervous about it, but why should she? She could take care of herself.

Besides, she had ulterior purposes in deciding to go. She remembered what Mr. Wakeham had said about the possible loss of her position, and of his promise to find her another. At that moment she could not afford to offend him. If Ellen Chellew had decided to leave her, then she must find some other place of abode. But where? Her whole nature revolted against herding with girls of a lower social and intellectual life than those with whom she was brought into contact now. Of course there were thousands of respectable girls in London, who earned their own living, and stopped at cheap boarding-houses and fourth-rate private hotels; but she could not bear the idea of staying at one of these. Her liberties would be restricted, her times of going out and coming in discussed. No, no, she had not left Hampstead for that!

She had thought, and thought bitterly, about what Emily Barnes had told her about Peg, and she was very miserable as a consequence. After all, she was her sister, and she had some duties towards her. Could she not help her and solve her own problem at the same time? The thought was horrible to her, but if she could join with Peg and Barnes in a flat she could perhaps help

in the rest, and pay enough for her own keep to be of assistance to them.

But to do that, she must keep on the right side of Mr. Wakeham. She knew he had told the truth about the slump in trade, and the consequent unemployment which existed; especially was this true, and increasingly true, with regard to girl workers, and she doubted whether any place of business would give her her present salary unless she had friends at court. Indeed, she would be dependent upon Mr. Wakeham for a reference.

Of course she was very angry at Emily Barnes' insinuations, but she could afford to laugh at them. What had she to do with conventions? And what if Mr. Wakeham were a married man? It was quite common for married men to take out single girls. Besides, it was necessary for her to be polite to him. So she determined to be very pleasant, and to that end dressed herself in the clothes she thought became her best, and looked forward to a pleasant evening. She was passionately fond of music and dancing, and loved dramatic displays of every sort.

One thing, however, troubled her: Ellen Chellew had informed her that she would not be able to go with her.

"But why?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, George and I have other plans," giggled the girl mysteriously. "But it's all right, Eleanor; you go and enjoy yourself."

"Where are you going? Why can't you come with us?"

"Never mind; we shall be all right."

So in spite of her disappointment in this direction she dressed herself carefully and made her way to the Frivolity Theatre. Mr. Wakeham had pleaded hard that he might call for her at her flat, but to this she would not consent, and at the time appointed she found herself at the theatre entrance.

"Hello, Eleanor," Mr. Wakeham greeted her, "here you are; and, by Jove, you look beautiful. I never saw you looking so pretty before. Every man who sees you will envy me."

"I didn't know I had given you permission to call me by my Christian name," she said a little uncomfortably.

"Oh, we're not at business now," laughed Wakeham, "we're out for a good time. Of course, you're Miss Trelawney at the office; we have to keep up appearances there, but to-night you are my little Eleanor. Won't you call me Dick?"

"Certainly I shall not."

"Oh, but you will before the night's over," laughed Wakeham. "You know I'm a little bit vexed with you."

"Why?"

"Because you wouldn't come and have some dinner with me before the show. One can always enjoy the programme better after a bottle of fizz."

Evidently Mr. Wakeham had had *his* bottle of fizz, for his large fleshy face was flushed and he was very garrulous. "Still," he went on, "you are *here,* and we're going to have a great time."

A few minutes later Eleanor was under the thrall of the performance. She loved this kind of thing. There was something in the bright lights, the gay colouring, the sound of the music, and the whole atmosphere of the place which intoxicated her like wine. Here, at all events, there was, to her, nothing of the grim sordidness of life. Here the best talent in London laid itself out to amuse her. The orchestra was excellent, the dresses gay, the singing was entrancing.

The theatre was filled to the doors; every sight and sound spoke of wealth and pleasure, and an abandonment to the spirit of the moment. The Revue itself was tawdry and silly—it did not pretend to be anything else. The Frivolity was not a place for serious things. It

ministered not to the mind, but to the senses. Often the jokes bordered on vulgarity, if not on the indelicate; but no one seemed to mind. People did not come there to study the problems of life, or to look at life as it really was. The scores of half-drunken youths who had brought their painted *inamoratas* would have been angry at the slightest approach to the serious. "Let us laugh and be merry" was the spirit of the whole place. Morality was laughed at, infidelity of wives towards husbands, and husbands towards wives, something to make a stage-joke about.

The play, if play it could be called, went on its way. Scene followed scene, dance followed dance, joke followed joke. Painted, tinselled, half-dressed girls capered on and off the stage; the music was sensuous, ravishing; light, colour, laughter abounded everywhere.

"Now this is the thing I like," laughed Mr. Wakeham. "This is the kind of show that appeals to me; pretty girls everywhere, good music, beautiful dancing, bright colours. Do you see that girl there at the end of the first row in the ballet? See her diamonds? They're worth five hundred if they're worth a penny. Pretty, ain't she?"

"Yes, a beautiful girl," replied Eleanor.

"Her mother was a scrub-woman in Battersea," laughed Wakeham. "Her salary's two pounds a week. She lives in a beautiful flat and keeps her motor car. I know who pays for 'em, too. But what's the odds so long as she's got 'em?" At that moment Eleanor almost felt as though Wakeham were right.

It was all over presently, and they left the gaily-lighted theatre for the streets. Outside, the crowds surged hither and thither, but Mr. Wakeham had everything carefully arranged. A motor car awaited them, into which he ushered her.

"I would take you to the Savoy or the Carlton," he said; "the grub's good there, so is the wine. But they have their closing hours, and the place we're going to is free from all that kind of rot."

A vague sense of discomfort possessed Eleanor, but she said nothing. She was still under the influence of the Revue that had entranced her. The car threaded its way through the quickly moving traffic, and presently she found herself in a part of London she did not recognize.

"This is the way, Eleanor, my dear," said Mr. Wakeham as he dismissed the car, and, although the place at which they stopped was dark and unattractive outside, it was full of light within. "I booked a table in a nice, cozy corner," he laughed. "Now then, we'll have a jolly little supper."

Certainly the *cuisine* of the place was excellent. The dishes were prepared by a genius. Whatever else the place possessed, it was able to tickle the palates of its clients. It was filled with a gay throng, too. People of seemingly all nationalities chattered and laughed, what time the orchestra discoursed gay music.

"This is something like, isn't it, old thing?" leered Mr. Wakeham. The waiter filled her glass as he spoke, and she drank almost with avidity—the hot fœtid air parched her throat.

She did not think about the kind of people about her. That did not matter; nothing mattered, it seemed to her, but the pleasure of the moment, and she felt strangely light-hearted. The wine, too, was exhilarating. She felt it tingling through her veins, making sadness impossible. She could not understand why she had been troubling about things. After all, what was there to trouble about? On every hand was laughter and music. In the near distance couples were footing merry music, and she was submerged in the whirlpool of the life she found there.

"Won't you have another glass?" asked Mr. Wakeham at length, when they had finished supper.

"No, I've had enough," was her reply. "Thank you very much. It has been splendid."

"Yes, they do very well here, don't they? I thought you would like it. Now we'll go into the dancing-room and have a hop."

They passed from the restaurant into a large gilded hall where the ceiling was decorated to appear as though it were the dome of the blue sky.

"Best floor in London, Eleanor," said Mr. Wakeham. "Shall we take it right away or will you sit down a minute?"

Eleanor sat down and watched the revelry, and as she did so, a kind of dizziness possessed her. The wine had flown to her head, and while she was completely master of her movements, and collected in her thoughts, she was under its influence. She looked around among the dancers and watched their senseless capering; in fact, it was not dancing at all. Half tipsy youths gyrated with tipsier girls. Their class was plain at a glance. Some were in their teens, girls of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, who had been carried away by the flood of so-called pleasure. How they got there, God only knew. Older women were also there, with womanly modesty all gone. Some could not hide the signs of dissipation and late hours, in spite of paint and powder. Evidently Mr. Wakeham was not a stranger there. Acquaintances, both men and women, came up and spoke to him. Formal introductions were unnecessary, and one man, whose character was plainly written in his face, sought to enter into conversation with Eleanor.

"The floor's a dream," he said; "mayn't I have the pleasure?"

"No, not yet, old man," objected Wakeham; "a bit

later, perhaps; but the first dance is for me; isn't it, Eleanor?"

She was utterly bewildered. She was still under the influence of the theatre, while the wine she had drunk still banished all thought of care. Yet at the background of her mind was wonder—almost shame.

She remembered that not one word had been said about a new position, and amid all the wild laughter and revelry it was impossible for her to think clearly.

Then something happened which opened her eyes. A man entered whom she knew. By his side was a woman, a woman whose class was written upon her face. Eleanor took but little notice of her; it was the man who frightened her. She knew little of him, but his house was not far from that of her father's at Hampstead, and she had more than once met him. "What if he should see me?" she almost gasped, and then she realized where she was. Yes, what if he were to see her and recognize her? What if he were to tell her father and mother, and what if he were to tell Rod Ravenscroft? . . . Of course it did not matter. She had cut off all her old associations! but the thought haunted her, nevertheless. Why had she come here? And why had not Ellen Chellew accompanied her?

A group of tipsy girls came up to her and spoke familiarly. She could see the paint and powder on their cheeks, and they reeked with wine and tobacco smoke; they claimed her as belonging to their class,—the saddest, the most tragic class in the world. Great God, the horror of it!

"Come, Eleanor darling, shan't we take the floor?" said Mr. Wakeham. "Here, have another glass of fizz, and then we'll start."

"No, not yet!" replied the girl. "I don't feel like dancing now. Besides, you told me that you would tell me about *the new position* you have for me."

"Position!" laughed Wakeham. "This isn't the place to discuss things like that, my pet. This is the place to enjoy ourselves. Come on."

Almost without resistance she allowed him to put his arm round her while they kept time to the music. Then she thought she saw the man she knew at Hampstead looking at her, and a cry of terror escaped her.

"I really can't stay here any longer," she cried, almost hysterically. "I want to go! I really must go! Don't trouble to come—I can find my way."

"Why, the night's young yet," laughed Wakeham. "Besides, I couldn't think of letting you go alone. When you go, I go."

"Then it must be now. I really can't stay here any longer."

The excitement caused by the wine had gone, and Eleanor felt frightened beyond words.

Suddenly the lights went out, and a frenzied cry went round the room.

"The police are here! The place is being raided!"

A feeling of terror possessed her. She had paid little attention to the information about raiding night clubs, but now she knew. If the police took possession of the place what would happen to her? She dreaded exposure. What would her father and mother say? What would Rod Ravenscroft think?

"It's all right, Eleanor," whispered Wakeham. "I know a way out. Come with me. I've been in this kind of thing before."

Cloakless and bareheaded she allowed him to lead her along some torturous passages. Evidently he was as anxious to avoid detection as she, and that fact gave her some comfort. A few seconds later they were in the street.

"Don't worry, Eleanor," laughed Wakeham. "We've dodged 'em all right. My, but that was a narrow escape!

It wouldn't do for Speke and Burnham to know that I'd been here."

A minute later he hailed a passing taxi, into which he handed her, and then took his seat by her side.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

"St. Hildebrand's Mansions," informed Wakeham with a laugh, "but take your time."

"But, really, you must not come with me," pleaded Eleanor.

"Of course I must," said Wakeham. "I haven't told you yet of the position I've got for you," and he laughed hoarsely.

"Then tell me quick!" she almost gasped. "And then you must really get out. I—I want to be alone."

"Come, come now, Eleanor,—but, yes, I'll tell you." Then he whispered something in her ear. The girl gave a cry of terror. "Now be sensible, my dear," pleaded Wakeham, and began to talk very volubly.

"No! no! Please stop!" she gasped.

"Nonsense; that won't do, Eleanor." Then he put his arm round her and tried to kiss her. The girl, frenzied with fear, and mad with anger, fought him with all her strength, and screamed aloud. "You little devil," cried Wakeham, mad with pain, "you're tearing my eyes out! Stop it, I say!"

The driver, hearing the cry, jammed down the clutch and placed his other foot heavily upon the brake. The girl, unheeding Wakeham's threats, managed to open the door and leap into the street. Where she was she did not know. She was filled with a rage, and fear, and shame. Unmindful of passers-by, and not knowing whither she was going, she ran until she was out of breath. Then she stopped and tried to collect her thoughts.

She was aware that two men were speaking to her—speaking in thick voices. It was now past midnight, and

she did not know where she was. She was helpless, too. She had brought no money with her. What the men said to her she did not know, but she did know that their presence was evil, and that one of them was a man who had spoken to her an hour before in the night club where she had been.

"Leave me!" she cried angrily, "or I'll call the police."

"*You* call the police!" laughed the man. "That won't do, old thing. You daren't call the police. If you did, you'd get into trouble, my dear. You're only drunk, that's all."

What she said she did not know. She hardly realized what was taking place, except that she was alone in London with two drunken men. She continued to protest, however, to protest angrily and helplessly. Oh, if she had some one to protect her! If only her brother John were there! If only—only——

Then as if by a miracle, a change came over the scene. Almost instinctively she felt as though a helpful presence were near her.

"Miss Trelawney," said a voice, "surely that can't be you!"

"Oh, help me, Rod—Mr. Ravenscroft—save me from these horrible men!"

Rod Ravenscroft turned on them fiercely.

"What have you to do with it?" replied the more drunken of the two. "It's none of your business. We know what she is. We know where we saw her an hour ago. She's drunk, too. We saw her running like a mad woman. That's why we spoke to her."

"Take me away!" panted Eleanor. "I want to get home. Give me your arm, will you, Mr. Ravenscroft?"

A little later she was hurrying away by Rod Ravenscroft's side, while the men laughed loudly and shouted obscene raillery.

"How came you here, Miss Trelawney?" asked Ravenscroft. "I—I don't understand."

"Oh, don't ask me!" she pleaded. "I want to get back to my flat. I live at St. Hildebrand's Mansions. It's all a mistake. I ought not to be here at all. But please don't ask me any questions; I can't bear it just now."

"Let me see you back to St. Hildebrand's Mansions," said Ravenscroft, still bewildered. "Or, better still, there's a taxi passing. I'll call it." He hailed it as he spoke, and Eleanor, feverishly, pantingly entered. "May I come with you, Miss Trelawney?" he asked.

"Oh, if you only would! I wouldn't trouble you—but I'm afraid!—it's all been so horrible!"

Without a word he took his seat by the girl's side, while she crouched in the corner of the conveyance, trembling and fearful.

"You're not ill, are you, Miss Trelawney?" he asked anxiously.

"No—no, not ill! Please don't speak to me!—and—and——" She was on the point of asking him not to tell her people how he had found her, but the words would not pass her lips.

In a few minutes the taxi stopped at the entrance to the gloomy block of buildings where she lived, and she got out. "Good-night, Mr. Ravenscroft, and thank you!—Oh, I don't know how to thank you!"

He watched her as she rushed into the vestibule and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HORROR OF THE AWAKENING

WHEN Eleanor entered her cheerless room she found it in entire darkness. Ellen Chellew had not returned. Switching on the light, she locked the door. What if Wakeham should follow her?

Presently, as no one came, and the silence of the night had fallen upon that part of London, she felt more calm and collected. She was able to think and to understand what had happened.

Oh, the horror of it all! The brutal, naked horror! She felt she had become years older in a day. A hundred things which had been mysteries were explained, and the explanation was ghastly beyond words.

What should she have done if Rod Ravenscroft had not appeared? It was only a chance in a thousand that he was passing there at that moment. Supposing he had not seen her, recognized her?

She shuddered at the thought of it. And what must he think? He had heard what those men had said, every word of which burned like fire into her brain. He must despise her. He must think her——

Then the secret of her life became plain to her in a second! Without warning, and seemingly without reason, her whole nature was revolutionized in a moment. She, who had laughed at the thought of love, knew that for weal or for woe, she loved the man who had rescued her that night.

She felt as though she were going mad. Horrible as

had been her previous experiences, they were as nothing to this. Suddenly it had come to her that Rod Ravenscroft was all the world to her, come to her at the time when he must be thinking of her with loathing and scorn!

She could not understand it at all. Hitherto she had thought of him kindly and regarded him as a pleasant fellow, but utterly old-fashioned and conventional. On one or two occasions before her father came home, she had gone with him to places of amusement with her mother's consent and approval. More than once, too, she had had an idea that he was fond of her. But as for caring for him, the thought had never seriously appealed to her. For that matter, she had regarded herself as incapable of love, and had felt a kind of contempt for girls who would sacrifice the liberties and privileges of girlhood to become the wife of any man. And now everything had changed. It seemed to her as though some new part of her being had been called into life, and that everything else in her past was submerged in this new wonderful passion which possessed her. She did not know whether she admired him or not. She had a feeling that he was strong and chivalrous, and that he suggested safety and confidence, but somehow these things did not seem to matter. He was the only man in the world for her, and all her past dreams seemed like so much mockery. Her heart went out to him in its entirety. All the wealth of her being was given to him. He was her king, her all. She would brave anything for him, do anything to serve him.

If—if——? But no, it was too late now. She had made everything impossible by her own actions.

What did he think of her?

Her mind swept back again over the events of the evening. She saw herself accepting Wakeham's invitation and going with him to the tawdry music hall. She remembered his coarse, vulgar laugh, and his still coarser

remarks which she had listened to, and not rebuffed. And then there was the horror of the night club afterwards. She had found herself in a place which was the resort of bad women and worse men. It was true many so-called society women went to such places. They went there " to see life," as they termed it, but she found no comfort in the thought. The horror of that hour haunted her. She remembered the coarse girls who came and greeted her so familiarly, called to mind their painted lips and cheeks, their coarse laughter, their silly vulgar chatter. And she had been there among them. She had allowed herself to be accompanied by a man who was a member of the club. Perhaps by this time the police had taken possession of it, while the names of those who had been there would on the following day be published to the world. From what had she escaped?

But that was not the worst of it. It was the hour which followed. Wakeham had spoken to her as though she were a thing to be bought and sold. He had made suggestions which made her wish that the earth would swallow her up; she felt demented, horror stricken.

This, then, was the actual outcome, the grim and ghastly logic, of Tamsin Cory's so-called advanced views. She felt that her womanhood was besmirched at the thought of it.

Then she recalled that other scene, when, after a mad struggle, she had managed to get into the street, and had fled from what now appeared to her in its ghastly nakedness. She thought of the drunken men who had spoken to her, of the words they had said to her,—and then came Rod Ravenscroft.

What must he think of her? Yesterday she professed not to care, but to-day, now, the world had become changed. She hungered for the love she had scorned, hungered for the love she had laughed at; and she had made everything impossible.

How wise her father had been! How kind! And she had spurned his kindness. Oh, if he would only come to her now and speak to her as he had spoken to her months before.

And then there was Peg. She had aided and abetted her in her mad determination to marry Barnes. She was largely responsible for the tragedy of it all, for it was tragedy. For the first time she saw things as they really were. She saw Barnes as he really was, a low-bred, vulgar outsider, a man who was common to the finger-tips. And she had half encouraged Peg in her mad infatuation for him. If what his sister said was true, Peg's whole life might be ruined, and she, because of the attitude she had taken, was largely responsible for it.

Hour after hour, heedless of the passing time, she sat thinking. The night was wonderfully still; London was asleep. Presently she looked at her watch. It had stopped. Then she heard one of the city clocks striking. It was three in the morning.

Why had not Ellen Chellew come? Where was she? She remembered the conversation which passed between them before she went out. She called to mind what Ellen had said.

Then the meaning of it all became plain, ghastly plain. She shuddered, and hid her head in shame. This was what loose conceptions of marriage really meant. This was the outcome of discarding the old religious beliefs in which she had been reared. And but for what seemed like a miracle she—she——

At length tired brain and body could bear no more. She threw herself on her bed and fell into a troubled sleep.

When morning came she awoke with a great weight on her heart. Something horrible had happened. At first she could not tell what, but presently it all flashed back to her. But she was less excited now, and could think of

things more calmly. She realized that she had her future to face, and she must think what to do. She counted her money carefully, and as she did so, the gray drabness of her prospects rose before her again.

First of all, she determined not to go back to Speke and Burnham. After what had happened the night before it was impossible. She simply could not sit in the same room with a man who had insulted her pride, insulted her womanhood;—the very thought of it made a flush of shame rush madly to her cheeks. She would starve rather than live in the poison of that man's presence!

Neither would she go home. That was as impossible as the other. How could she? She called to mind what had passed between her and her father. Remembered, too, what she had constantly said to her mother, for Eleanor Trelawney's pride was unconquered. All sorts of questions would be asked her, and she —— No, she simply could not. She had left home because she wanted to live her own life, and although she felt she had been a failure, a miserable failure, she could not go back humbled and penitent.

But what could she do? It was true she might be able to find a position in the city, but any respectable employer would want references. If she mentioned Speke and Burnham, they would naturally refer the matter to Wakeham, and she felt sure of what Wakeham would say. Besides, she could not, she simply could not be beholden to that man.

But she must find work, else she would starve.

She remembered the Russian who had offered her—whether seriously or not she was not sure—a post in some organization which existed for the purpose of Bolshevik propaganda. He had mentioned a good salary, too, but her heart gave no response to the suggestion. These people did not stand for law and order, and de-

cency. These Bolshevists not only scouted the idea of God, but of all Christian morals. She remembered a sentence which this man had said to her: "Religion is a sort of opiate and opiates are always bad. Religion has no place in the life of a thoughtful man."

She could not help thinking of her father at this moment. He had given his life to the establishment of order and decency. How, then, could she work for that which he had offered his life to avert?

But what could she do?

That was the question which haunted her with grim persistence.

A few minutes later she sat down to her lonely breakfast. Outside the church bells were ringing, calling people to worship, but she had no thought of worship; her mind was too filled with the drab persistence of sordid facts.

Almost mechanically she washed the few breakfast utensils which she had been using and then stood still.

"I'll go and see Peg," she said. "I've neglected her."

She was on the point of putting on her hat and jacket when she heard a step outside her door. Then some one knocked.

Could it be Wakeham? Had he dared to hunt her in this fashion? But she was not afraid now; daylight gave her confidence, and a score of people were within call.

The knock was repeated.

Her heart beat wildly, why she could not tell, but she went to the door and opened it, and saw Rod Ravenscroft. Instantly her face was suffused with a flush of shame. She called to mind their meeting on the previous night, remembered what had taken place. Then pride came to her aid. Not for worlds would she let him see, or even suspect, what she felt towards him.

"Good-morning, Miss Trelawney. You'll forgive my

calling, won't you? But I thought you looked ill last night."

"You are very kind," she replied quietly. "Won't you come in?"

He entered the room hesitatingly, awkwardly. He, too, remembered the previous night's experience, and felt sensitive. As a consequence he tried to find something to say in order to explain his presence, but nothing would come. He was but a simple-hearted fellow, in spite of a brilliant university career, and he was not an adept in talking with girls. Besides, the circumstances were peculiar.

By this time Eleanor had been able to obtain control over herself. Somehow, why, she could not say, he had given her a sense of confidence.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Ravenscroft? And will you please excuse me while I get the room into something like order? I—I did not expect a visitor."

She was glad she was able to speak calmly. Not for worlds would she let him know what she felt. Last night she had been mad with fear and terror, and as a consequence she felt abject, penitent; but now the old fighting spirit had come back again.

She loved him beyond words, but she would do anything rather than let him know it.

For a few minutes they talked on trivial matters, and never once did he refer to the predicament in which he had found her; but Eleanor knew what he was thinking, and while she dreaded explanations, she longed to stand well in his eyes. But how could she explain away what he had seen and heard?

"Have you been to Duloe lately?" she asked at length.

Duloe was the name of the parish in Cornwall where the original Trelawney Mansion was situated, and this had perhaps led General Trelawney to give his house at Hampstead that name.

"No, not for two or three weeks," he replied, "but I sometimes call. You see, John is a great friend of mine."

"You have not been there this morning?"

He shook his head. "No, Miss Trelawney."

"I suppose you have been wondering at the predicament in which you saw me last night," she stammered.

"I'm very glad I happened to be passing," was his reply. "I had been spending the evening with some Oxford friends. We all met at the chambers of Dick Pascoe, and I had not left them more than a few minutes before I—I saw you. I was afraid you were in trouble."

Her face crimsoned with shame. She longed to let him know the truth, but she could not. Her mind was torn by conflicting influences.

"I suppose you feel it your duty to—inform them at Duloe of what you saw?" she blurted out presently, and she was angry with herself the moment the words had passed her lips.

"I don't think I deserve that, Miss Trelawney."

"Come now, confess," and she tried to speak lightly, "haven't you felt all the morning that you ought to go to General Trelawney and tell him that you saw his daughter under the most distressing circumstances, and that but for you something terrible might have happened to her?"

"And if I did?" he flashed back, "wouldn't it have been natural? Yes, I will be quite frank and candid with you: I will take the liberty of an old friend—I will even go farther than that—I will take the liberty of one who, a few months ago, dared to hope great things. But, of course, that has all gone now."

She misunderstood his meaning, and a kind of despair came into her heart which was mingled with an unreasoning anger.

"And why have you come here this morning?"

"I came—I hardly know why. I came, I think, because I wanted to help you."

"Why should you want to help me?"

"Because you need help. I am sure of that."

"Yes," she laughed, "I do need help. I need help in getting a position. I have lost my place." Her voice was hard and bitter.

"Come, Miss Trelawney," pleaded Ravenscroft, "isn't it foolish to talk like that? I'm sure your father and mother are longing for you to come home."

"My mother may be, but my father——!"

"Yes, your father," repeated Ravenscroft. "I suppose you'll think me a prig, and be angry at what seems like bad taste in speaking, but I cannot help it. If your father saw what I saw last night, it would break his heart."

She laughed defiantly. "My father cares nothing for me," she cried. "He tried to treat me as though I were a child, as though I had no mind of my own, as though I were a little pet dog led by a string."

"No," said Ravenscroft, "that's false. I have never talked with your father about your reasons for leaving home, but I know you're not speaking the truth. Of course, it's not my business, but I tell you plainly I think your behaviour damnable."

"What behaviour?" she flashed back.

"Your behaviour in leaving your home as you did."

"What do you know about it?" Eleanor had become utterly defiant and regardless of consequences. She was more than angry with herself at adopting this attitude, but she wanted to defy Ravenscroft, wanted, in spite of the fact that her heart was even now yearning for him, to assert her independence, and to fling back the accusations which she felt hung upon his lips. A score of conflicting passions surged in her heart. Love, anger, tenderness, defiance, shame, pride, eagerness to explain, yet

determination never to yield an inch all worked within er.

"What I did, I did after due consideration," she asserted hotly. "My father would not allow me to choose my own friends. He arrogated to himself the right of deciding who my friends should be, where I should go, and where I should not go; as though a girl of any individuality will allow herself to be dictated to in that way."

"Do you permit me to speak freely, Miss Trelawney?" asked Ravenscroft.

"Yes, speak," she laughed defiantly.

"Then I tell you this. I think your father was right in insisting on what he did. No girl, if she cares for her own self-respect, should come home in the early hours of the morning and refuse to let her parents know where she has been. No father with right feeling would allow it. And you did these things, Miss Trelawney, and then because your father insisted upon obedience to his will, you aided and abetted your sister in making a mad marriage, and left home."

"What right have you to say this to me?" and her voice was husky with passion.

"The right you gave me a minute ago," he replied. "But that is not all. I have the right of one who once loved you, who, months ago, idealized you, and who would have given his life to serve you. I know now that my love was hopeless, but I cannot help caring for your welfare. And I say this, Miss Trelawney, you are leading a dangerous life."

"What do you know about my life?" she asked.

"What I saw last night."

"And because of that you came here to insult me?"

"No," he replied, "I came as one wishing you well. I came to ask you not to allow yourself to throw away your life."

"And because you rendered me a service you claim

the right to—to dispose of my future, I suppose." In her mad anger she scarcely knew what words were passing her lips. "I tell you this, Mr. Ravenscroft, I am fully able to take care of myself, and I could, if I felt so disposed, explain everything you saw last night, even to your satisfaction. But I don't feel so disposed, because you have not the right to know."

"Few girls in London are able to take care of themselves," was his reply, "especially when they are as beautiful as you are. If I had a sister I would rather see her go into a house infected by smallpox than to see her living amidst such companionships as you have chosen."

"What do you know about my companionships?"

"I know the opinions Miss Tamsin Cory holds. I have heard about Miss Chellew, who occupies these rooms with you. I know men who know Miss Jeffreys and her friends, and Mrs. Gracechurch, who was divorced only a few months ago."

"How do you know these things?"

"Because I have made it my business to find out," and his voice was as defiant as hers. "If a woman lives in infectious houses, Miss Trelawney, the likelihood is that she will catch the disease. But I did not come here to quarrel with you. I came because I could not help it," and there was a catch in his voice as he uttered the last words.

She looked at him quickly, searchingly. There was something in his tones that made her heart throb madly. Again her anger died down, and a great longing came into her heart to defend, to justify herself, to prove to him that she was not what she imagined in her terror he thought she was.

"I know you're thinking about what you saw last night," she then said. "Let me tell you this, then, although the circumstances were—yes, horrible, my mother has no reason to blush for me. I went—where I did—to

obtain a post. I went—in the hope of—helping Peg. The rest was—hideous, I know, but as far as I am concerned, you saw the—the worst." She half stammered, half sobbed the words that came from her with difficulty, and she could not help a feeling of joy as she saw the changed look in his eyes.

"Miss Trelawney," he said quietly, "I never thought —harm of you,—that way. I couldn't. But will you not go back to your father?"

"No," she replied obstinately. She was afraid she had said too much, and yet did not know wherein she had made a mistake. Her pride was surging back again now, and with that pride a sense of defiance. "I know what my father thinks of me, and I will not go back like a prodigal child, even although he might kill the fatted calf for me." And she laughed bitterly.

"All I want, Mr. Ravenscroft," she went on, "is the means to live my own life."

"Then you are leaving Speke and Burnham's?"

"How did you know?"

"I am trying to put two and two together," was his answer.

"They are cutting down expenses," replied Eleanor, "and as a consequence some of their staff is being discharged."

"That's not true," replied Ravenscroft; "I know young Speke very well. It's one of the most prosperous firms in the city, and there is no thought of cutting down expenses."

"Then—then," but she did not say more. The truth flashed across her mind. "I have to leave there anyhow. I must—I could not go back."

Again she noted the peculiar flash of his eyes. She felt that he knew more than he said.

He rose to his feet. "I cannot persuade you to go back to your home, then?" he said.

She shook her head.

"May I tell your father and mother that I have seen you?"

"No, I hope you'll tell them nothing"

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing."

He held out his hand to her. "Good-morning, Miss Trelawney," he said. "I hope you'll forgive my coming. And, of course, I'd no right to speak to you as I did. Will you forgive me?"

Her eyes were drawn to his as he spoke, and something overmastered her, she knew not what. She felt that tears were welling up, that her lips were trembling. He held her hand in his.

"Will you not tell me that you forgive me?" he said.

"Go—go! please go!" and, snatching her hand away from his, she flung herself on the chair and, burying her face in her hands, sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Miss Trelawney," said Rod Ravenscroft, anxiously, "are you not well? Tell me."

"Go! go! please go!" she sobbed.

He stood looking at her for a few seconds as if undecided what to do. Then with a sigh he opened the door and passed out, while she continued to sob as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXIV

PEGGY'S ROMANCE FADES

"SOMETHING will have to be done," said Jim Barnes, who had been standing for a long time, sullen and silent, looking into vacancy.

Peg did not reply.

"Have you nothing to say? Why, we're right up against it. We've got to do something. We owe three weeks' rent, and this pile of bills. I can see nothing for it but a moonlight flitting."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Clearing out. We have no money, and you won't do anything."

"What can I do?" and the girl's tones were sullen and defiant.

"Do!" he said with an oath. "You could do a lot. But you'll do nothing. You're willing to sponge upon me for everything."

"Sponge upon you! Be careful what you say, Jim."

"Why should I be careful?" he asked. "Besides, it's true."

"You didn't talk like that when I lived at home," she protested. "You told me you were earning good money, and that it would be the joy of your life to buy things for me, and now——" She shrugged her shoulders.

Barnes laughed brutally. "Yes, and a nice fool I made of myself," he said. "Instead of marrying a girl with money, as I thought, she hasn't got a sou."

"I had nearly thirty pounds, and I gave you every penny of it."

"Thirty pounds! What's that?" sneered Barnes. "It all went in a week or two. Oh, you throw up that to me, do you?—your dirty thirty pounds. You paid me thirty pounds to take you, did you? And a nice bargain I made of it. Spent it all in less than a month in theatres and dinners. Good Lord, do you think I could keep that up? People who have got extravagant ideas should pay for them. You would never go into the balcony. It was always the dress circle or the stalls for you. You would never go to the movies; they were too common for your ladyship. You must have a regular play. You would never go to a 'Jolly Ten' Sociable; nothing but a high-priced affair would suit you, and I—I had to pay for it. Of course, people who went to ordinary dances weren't good enough for you. Let me tell you this, madam, my sisters go to them, and they're as good as you."

Peg did not reply.

"Yes, as good as you for all your fine name and aristocratic connections. Aristocratic connections, indeed! Fat lot of good they are to me."

"You were eager enough to get them," Peggy retorted.

"Oh, cut that!" cried Barnes. "I'm just sick of it all. Yes, I know I was a tom-fool; I ought to have known better than to marry a proud minx like you. But there, we must do something. We can't stay on here. Look at this letter."

After this there was a silence between them for perhaps a minute. Then Barnes burst out:

"We shall have to do it."

"What?" she asked.

"Go home to Camden Town."

"I won't!" she cried passionately. "I simply won't!"

"Won't you? Why, you silly fool, we can live there rent free. That will mean more than two pound a week difference to us. Mother's got a spare room we can

have, and I'll pay her something for keeping us. In fact, we can rub along then."

"I won't!" repeated Peggy angrily. "I simply won't!"

"Why won't you?"

"I couldn't live day by day with your mother and sisters."

"Couldn't you, indeed! They're as good as you are, and a jolly sight better. My sisters are self-respecting girls. They earn their own living and keep the house going. That's more than you do."

"You may say what you like," cried Peggy, "but I won't do it. You know what they said to me the last time I was there."

"That was only their fun," laughed Barnes. "Besides, they're a bit fed up. Who wouldn't be? Of course they thought your father would do the straight thing, and come down handsome. If he'd been a gentleman he would have allowed us, say, four pound a week, and then we could have rubbed along. Besides, what can we do? It's all very well to take the high and mighty style, and say you won't do this, and you won't do that; but we've got to pay for these rooms or be kicked out. And we've not got the money. And there are these bills. Oh, what a tom-fool I was to marry an extravagant, useless thing like you!"

"You were glad enough to get me," was Peggy's retort.

"Was I?" sneered Barnes. "It was you who did all the courting, dear. I had no need to do *any*."

"Oh, you mean, contemptible outsider," gasped the girl in her rage.

"Look here, none of that!" said Barnes, taking a savage stride towards her. "I'm not going to stand any of your cheek. Mean, contemptible outsider, am I? Well, go *and live with your* mean, contemptible insiders!"

Peggy stood before him defiant, her eyes flashing. "Don't think you can frighten me," she cried. "You *are* a mean, contemptible outsider, or you wouldn't speak like that."

Barnes caught her roughly by the arm. "Say that again," he said, "and I'll blacken your eye," and he lifted his hand as if to strike her.

All the fighting spirit in the girl was aroused, and she felt contaminated by his touch. Pride of race, and all the influences of her early associations surged within her. She felt degraded by passing through such scenes, for this was only a repetition of others of a similar nature. But she was not afraid. Something, she knew not what, caused her to defy him, and challenge him to do his worst.

"Strike me!" she cried, her voice quivering. "Strike me! It's the kind of thing a creature like you would do. But remember, I'll tell my brother John, and I'll tell my father, too."

"Bah, you daren't! Your brother John!" and Barnes laughed uneasily. "He's afraid to come near me. He remembers the licking I gave him at the Cosmopolitan Hotel months ago."

"Yes, I heard about that!" answered the girl. "Why, he thrashed you within an inch of your life. Jenkins told me so himself."

"Jenkins did, did he? I'll pay him out for that."

"Now then, strike me," and the girl looked fearlessly and defiantly into his face.

Barnes dropped her arm and walked away muttering.

Things had come to a crisis. The room in which they now lived was not the place to which Barnes had first brought her. That was comparatively comfortable, but it cost more than they could afford to pay, and after much heart-searching on Peggy's part, she had consented to come to their present abode. It was a miserable,

squalid place, and the surroundings were anything but savoury. Still, Peggy had consented. Barnes had told her that it need only be for a little time, as he expected a raise in his wages shortly, and when that time came, they would be able to return to more comfortable surroundings. But the raise of wages did not come, and even this shabby little room was more than they could pay for.

Peggy, like many other girls of her class, was utterly unfit to be a wife. She was young and inexperienced, and had always refused to learn housekeeping. In addition, although her father was not a wealthy man, the family had always been able to live in comfort. She had but little knowledge of the value of money, and did not realize how quickly what seemed to her a large amount could melt away. Moreover, having been brought up as she had, she had at first protested against going to cheap restaurants and cheap places of amusement, and for a time Barnes had yielded to her. But little by little facts stared her in the face.

For the first two months after their marriage Barnes still appeared to her a gay Lothario. She was still under the spell of his handsome presence and high-flown talk; but in time she became disillusioned. She saw the kind of man to whom she had linked her life, realized how utterly different he was from those of her own class. She could not help seeing that he was a common, vulgar braggart. They had scarcely a taste in common, and to all intents and purposes, they spoke a different language.

But she would not admit this even to herself. By nature she was self-willed and obstinate, and she would not confess that she had made a mistake in marrying. With a kind of doggedness, therefore, which sometimes almost amounted to heroism, she tried to shut her eyes to his real *nature*, and to be a good wife to him.

In this, however, she was only partially successful. As the glamour of her marriage passed, and the ugly spectres of poverty and brutalism appeared, she grew hard and sullen. In fact she was fast awakening to the grim reality of the life she had chosen.

Shortly after the visit which her father and mother paid her, she received a letter from the latter telling her that if ever she was in trouble she must let her know. She also stated that while her father still kept his doors open to her, they would forever remain closed to Barnes. This man, he would neither admit to his house, nor recognize in any way. Her mother had also asked her if she might come to see her.

The letter was, possibly, not wisely written. Certain it is that Peggy, angered by the insult which she considered had been offered to her husband, had written defiantly to her mother declaring that she needed neither the help nor the recognition of any one at Hampstead, and would not have it if it were offered to her. She also stated that by her husband's wish, seeing her father's house was closed to him, their house was closed to them, and to John—especially to John.

Barnes had been very angry when she had told him what she had done. Even yet, that gentleman had hopes of a recognition taking place, and he thought Peggy had made it impossible by what he called "her —— silly pride."

But now things had come to a crisis. Barnes had received no raise in salary, and debts stared them in the face. With the romance of marriage entirely gone, the shabby sordidness of their surroundings hardened Peggy. A month before this Barnes had suggested that they should go and live with his people at Camden Town, and she had refused, and as week after week he still harped upon this string, she, while her defence became weaker and weaker, loathed the idea more and more.

"We must do something," grumbled Barnes at length, after striding around the room.

"There's one thing you can do."

"What?" he asked.

"You can do with a little less whiskey. Only two days ago I asked you for a new pair of gloves and you told me you couldn't afford it. But you're able to pay sixteen shillings for a bottle of whiskey."

"Look here," cried Barnes, "I'm not going to do without a drop of whiskey for you or any one. Besides, a man must offer a friend a drink if he comes to see him. And I tell you this——"

He stopped suddenly as if a new thought had struck him, and after a few seconds' silence he went on in more conciliatory tones. "Look here, Peg, old girl," he said, "we are in a bad way. You must forgive me if I spoke to you a bit hasty just now: but I've my pride the same as you have. Of course things haven't turned out as we expected. I tell you straight I did hope your father would have been reasonable; I didn't think he'd carry things to such a length as he has, and I thought after he'd got used to the idea he'd have—caved in. But he hasn't. Now I'm as proud as Lucifer in some things, but it's no use being silly."

"You told me you were going to have a raise of salary," snapped Peggy.

"I thought I was, but business is bad, and I'll tell you straight—I dare not ask for more money. The gov'ner gave me a hint, only to-day, that he might soon ask me to get another place, and if he did I don't know where I could get one. Jobs ain't going begging now like they were. See?"

"You mean that you might be out of work?" asked Peggy.

"That's what I do mean, old girl, and then we should

be in the soup—head over ears in the soup. I'm sorry, Peg, really downright sorry."

The girl looked with abject misery towards the fireplace.

"Come, Peg, can't you help me out?" asked Barnes.

"How can I help you out?"

"Swallow your pride a bit. Of course I couldn't do it after what your father said to me; no man of fine feelings could. He insulted me, while your brother called me names which no man of such a sensitive nature as mine could stand. No, I'd rather die than ask any of them for a penny. But you could, Peg. It's your right. You've done nothing to disgrace them, and I say you have a moral right to a quarter of your father's fortune, whatever it is."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the girl.

"Peg, be sensible. You wouldn't be asking for charity or anything of that sort. You'd be simply claiming what's your own. It's your father's duty to make you an allowance."

Again the girl's temper flared up. "Do you mean to suggest," she cried, "that I go to my father and ask him that?"

"I didn't say your father," said Barnes coaxingly, "but your mother. She's still soft on you, Peg, and she would not turn a deaf ear to you. For the love you bear me, old girl, go and ask her for a bit of help."

"I'll starve first!" cried the girl. "That's your pride, is it? You'd see me, after all you've said to me months ago, go like a beggar to my father's house! You're meaner than I thought."

"Then starve!" cried Barnes with an angry oath. He seized his hat from a peg as he spoke, and put on his overcoat.

"Where are you going?" asked the girl.

"Where I like," was his reply. "Do you think I'm

going to stay here to be insulted by a proud, penniless, bad-tempered thing like you? If I can't get comfort at home, I'll go where I *can* get it."

He slammed the door as he spoke and left the girl alone. He came back again after a few seconds, however.

"Look here, Peg," he cried, "you'll be reasonable, won't you?"

"Not in the way you suggest," she said, "I won't."

"Then ask your sister to help us. She's got money."

"She hasn't," cried the girl. "She's only her salary, and it's barely enough for her to live on."

"That won't do," and Barnes laughed meaningly. "She gets money all right, Peg. I met a man only today, who saw her having supper at a gay place with her boss. We know what *that* means. She's got money right enough. I tell you——" but he did not proceed further. There was a look in Peggy's eyes which made him afraid.

"Go!" she said hoarsely. "Go before I kill you."

"Why, why, you little spitfire!" he muttered. But he obeyed her. Again he closed the door behind him and left the girl to her thoughts.

It was now about nine o'clock at night, and the neighbourhood in which Barnes had taken up his abode was gloomy and cheerless. When he left Peggy it was with the determination to seek out some of his pals, as he called them, and make a night of it.

"Let her think what she likes," he muttered angrily. "I'm going to enjoy myself."

A few minutes later, however, he changed his mind.

"I believe it could be managed," he said aloud, "and I'm not going to cut off my nose to spite my face. He's a General now, and all sorts of a big gun. I've gone the wrong way to work in the past. I've taken the high hand, but now, I'll do the humble touch."

The idea seemed to please him the more he thought

about it. When, at length, he found himself at Charing Cross his mind seemed fully made up.

"At any rate, nothing venture, nothing won," he reflected as he entered the subway, "and if I can once get the thin edge of the wedge in, the rest will come easy."

Twenty minutes later he was at Hampstead, and then, with a fast beating heart, he made his way to the house which had once been his wife's home. As he entered the gateway he saw that several windows of the house were ablaze with light, and in the stillness of the night there came to him the sound of merry music and gay laughter.

"They're not breaking their blooming hearts anyhow," he said to himself. "His youngest daughter has to think where her next meal is coming from while he lives in a style like this."

A minute later he rang the bell, which was opened by a maid he had not seen there before.

"Is General Trelawney at home?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, "but he's engaged."

"Have you company?" and he gave the girl a smile which he thought was very entrancing.

"Yes," was the reply.

"I'm sorry to call at such an inopportune time," he said in his most lordly manner, "but my business is very urgent, very urgent, indeed. Won't you ask him to see me for just a minute?"

The girl looked at him closely and tried to sum him up. He was not quite a gentleman, but he did not suggest the vagrant or the beggar.

"If you will ask him to see me for just a minute," he persisted.

"What name?" asked the girl.

"The name doesn't matter at all," said Barnes, "but my business is exceedingly important, and I'll only keep the General five minutes."

Barnes stood waiting while the girl went into the ad-

joining room and he noticed that the music and laughter ceased.

Evidently the General was asking some questions, and Barnes, dire as was the predicament in which he was placed, felt like running away, but before he could do so the General stepped into the hall. This was dimly lit, and thus, while the outline of Barnes' figure was plainly to be seen, his features were not easily recognizable.

"You wish to see me?" and the General gave only a careless glance towards a tall figure which stood waiting. "Will you come this way?"

He led the way into an empty room, and switched on the light. Then he turned to his visitor.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" and a look flashed into his eyes which was anything but pleasant.

For a few seconds he stood without speaking further. He seemed to be debating what to do. Doubtless he was angry that Barnes should have called on him. Remembering all that had taken place, it was no wonder. But there was something else expressed in his face. Anger was followed by a look of yearning and tenderness. He remembered the little maid, who, long years before, he had fondled and caressed, and his heart went out to her now. But for that he would have shown Barnes the door, and it was this fact that gave his visitor the opportunity he sought.

"What do you want?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXV

TREV'S ENGAGEMENT

THAT had been the happiest evening which General Trelawney had known for some months. Almost for the first time since his home-coming, the house had been a house of mirth. He had laughed like a boy, and had thrown off all thoughts of care and sorrow. He had sung old songs with gusto. He had revealed a sense of humour of which few thought him capable, and had entered into the merriment of the evening as though he had not a care upon his heart.

"Never knew Dad had it in him," remarked John to his friend Davenport who was of the party. "Why, he's younger than any of us."

"Yes, he's broken out in a new place, hasn't he?" replied Davenport. "Up to now he's always been the dignified 'pukka' officer. Why, he could earn his living on the stage! He seems to have forgotten what a great officer he is, and acts like a kid."

And this was true. All that military precision and more than a suggestion of stateliness which was characteristic of him had been thrown aside.

For months, in spite of the honours which had been heaped upon him, and in spite of the encomiums which had been passed upon him in high places, General Trelawney's face had revealed a sad, disappointed man. He had a genius for affection. No man thought more for his wife and children than he. He never made a plan but that they participated in it, and before his return to England his one thought was how he could make his children happy.

Perhaps that was why his disappointment was so great at the attitude, especially of Eleanor and Peggy. It had come upon him almost like a thunderbolt, and neither honour nor success could atone for what seemed to him the tragedy of his children's lives. He was still anything but a rich man, although his promotion had meant a larger income; but he had enough to live in affluence, and to grant any reasonable desire of those he loved. But the things he hoped for had been made impossible. Eleanor had, to all intents and purposes, refused his affections. She had resented what seemed to him the commonest essentials of home discipline, while Peggy had preferred to link her life to a man who was utterly unworthy, rather than share his home and his love.

His boy, Trev, too, had disappointed him. Not that he was a bad fellow. Indeed, in some respects he was proud of him. He was tall and handsome, and made a smart officer. He had also done fairly well in his regiment; but the father had been saddened by his son's selfishness and spendthrift habits. He had lived only for himself, and had run up debts without a thought of the suffering which he might inflict by so doing.

But, to-day, the General had been happy, even in spite of his two daughters; and the reason was that Trev had come home from Ireland. Not only that, he had come home changed almost out of recognition.

For some time after going to Ireland, Trev's letters had been disappointing. Mostly they had been complaints of what a beastly hole Ireland was to live in, and of expenses which he could not meet. Then suddenly the father thought he saw a change in his letters. They were no longer filled with grumbling, and no mention was made of an increased allowance. This was followed by the news that Trev had obtained leave and was coming back for at least a fortnight.

He had arrived home on the previous day, and both

father and mother had welcomed him with outstretched arms.

"This is splendid, Trev," declared the General. "And you say you have a whole fortnight?"

"Hope so, Dad," said Trev with a laugh. "But is anything the matter?"

"Why, my boy?"

"You look a bit seedy and worried, and the little Mother doesn't look as rosy as she used to. Why is it?"

"Don't you worry about us, my boy."

"But I do, Dad," replied Trev. "You don't look nearly so well as you did when I saw you in Plymouth. Is there something wrong? Money, or anything of that sort?"

"Why should you think that?"

Trev was silent a minute. "I'm afraid I've caused you a lot of bother, sir, and I want to tell you that I'm ashamed of myself, I am really."

"Why, my boy? Is anything the matter with you?"

"Oh, no, sir," and Trev laughed merrily, "but I was a fool, I know, and a spendthrift fool into the bargain. I thought—I thought —— But that's all over, sir."

"I don't understand you," said the General.

"I'll tell you about it directly, sir."

The General saw that there was a new light in his boy's eyes, that a wondrous change had come over him.

"But where are the girls?" went on Trev. "Why aren't they here?"

"You don't know? You've never heard?" queried the General.

"No. Of course they have not written me: but there's nothing new in that. They never have written me, and I'm afraid I have been just as careless. But where are they? Is anything the matter?"

"My boy," said the General, "that's the whole *trouble.*"

"What's the whole trouble?"

In a few words, his father told him. He softened the story as much as possible, but at best it was a tragic business, and the young soldier saw the meaning of his father's drawn and haggard face, and the wistful look in his mother's eyes.

"Yes, it's a bad business," said the General at length, "and it's blackened everything; but I'm glad to see you, my boy, glad to have you home. Now then, tell me about yourself. You look better, happier."

"Yes, I am," replied the young officer. "Dad, I'm ashamed of myself, I am really. I want you to forgive me."

"To forgive you? I don't understand, my boy. Have you done anything wrong?"

"Oh, no, sir. No, I've done nothing wrong, that is in the way you think. But I've been a mean, selfish cuss, and my eyes are opened. I want to tell you about it. Why, when you came down to see me at Plymouth, my one thought of your coming was a sort of pride because you'd won a big name, and because I thought you'd pay my debts, and I can see now how disappointed you must have been. You came back after all those years, and I —I—well, we won't talk about that now; but my eyes are opened, Dad."

"But I don't understand, my boy," and there was a catch in the General's voice.

"You will when you have seen her, sir."

"Seen who?"

"Yes, seen who?" repeated Mrs. Trelawney, eagerly.

"May I bring her here, sir? She's in England—in London, for that matter."

"What is it, my boy?" asked the father eagerly. "Have you fallen in love? Are you engaged?"

"Fallen in love! I should rather think I have," replied Trev, and his eyes were moist as he spoke. "But

engaged! I wish I were. But let me tell you about it, sir."

"But who is it, Trev?" repeated Mrs. Trelawney, her voice tremulous.

"The greatest, sweetest, best, truest girl in all the world!" cried Trev hilariously. "I came home mostly on account of that. It was difficult to get away, but I persisted and persisted until the C. O. consented. I met her near Belfast, sir. Her father has a place there, and I had to go to Belfast on duty. It wasn't a long job, but I had to go there for a week, and I met her, and fell in love at first sight. She comes of a Cornish family, too, think of that! Do you know the Penryns, Dad?"

"I've heard of them, certainly."

"They're not very rich," went on Trev, "but they're your sort, Dad. Mr. Arthur Penryn, that's Mary's father, has a little place not far from Belfast, as I told you, and he was sent over to Ireland on some Government work. A fine old chap he is, just the perfect type of an old English squire;—and keen, too, keen as mustard. As for Mrs. Penryn, Mother will love her at first sight. Well, we met at a dance, and I was up to my neck in two minutes," and again Trev laughed hilariously. "Of course I was not introduced to her as a nameless nobody," he went on. "When Mrs. Penryn knew I was your son, it was all right. As for Mary! I say, Dad, you must see her!"

"Of course I must see her," laughed the General, who had followed Trev's sketchy and somewhat disconnected story with great interest. "But tell me more, my boy."

"Yes, tell us more. Tell us everything, Trev," cried Mrs. Trelawney.

"Well, sir, as I told you, I fell head-over-heels in love, and she's made everything new to me, sir. She isn't the ordinary society girl, although of course the family *moves* among the best people. She's a real girl, and—

and it was she who made me ashamed of myself. She made me see what a selfish, mean brute I had been."

"In what way, my son?"

"Oh, I don't know. But when I saw how fond she was of her father and mother, and how unselfish she was, how she was always willing to sacrifice her own pleasure for them, and how before she did anything, however little, she considered whether it would please them or not—I—thought of the way I'd behaved. It was that kind of thing, sir. She's made a new fellow of me."

"I'm awfully glad to hear what you say, my boy, but did you say you were engaged?"

"No, sir, I wish I were! But I believe it's all right,—in fact I feel sure it is."

"Well, then, tell me how matters stand."

"It's like this," and again Trev laughed happily. "As I told you, I lost my heart at the dance. Of course, I didn't say anything, I dared not, but I met her as often as I could, and I got the C. O. to send me to that district more than once, and as I did my work fairly well he seemed willing; and every time I saw her—well, you know, sir, how a chap feels. So I spoke to Mr. Penryn."

"Yes, yes," said the General. "What did he say?"

"Well, he asked about you, sir. He asked whether I'd written and told you. He said that marriage was such a serious matter that you ought not to be left out of it. But I could not help letting her know how I felt, and the upshot of it all is, sir, that when they returned to England I got leave, and here I am, and they're in London, and I want you to ask them up here. Will you?"

"Of course I will. Nothing will give me greater pleasure! I don't know Mr. Arthur Penryn, but I know of him."

"They have a house in Kensington, sir, 36 Park Side Gardens. Can't you ring them up right away?"

"Won't that be rather rushing it, Trev?"

"It may be, sir, but I—I don't think so. You have no idea what a splendid girl she is! She's made me see everything differently and I want you to know her. I'm sure you'll love her. She is not a bit showy or that kind of thing, but she's a true girl, sir, and made me see everything differently."

This was the story which Trev had to tell his father, a story which made the General's heart beat with joy. It was not very eloquently told, yet it revealed the fact that Trev Trelawney had been brought to see the truth through the influence of a pure girl. That his love for one who was pure-minded, unselfish, and unsullied, had brought to life possibilities which had been long dormant in his nature.

Before the day was over Mr. and Mrs. Penryn and their daughter Mary had promised to dine at the Trelawneys' on the following evening, and as a consequence Trev was in the seventh heaven of delight.

When John came home, Trev, instead of meeting him as he had in the past, with a rather supercilious stare, and an attitude of patronage, was eager for his brother's company, eager to tell him his story.

"I say, Dad," said John, after a long talk with his brother, "you know Dick Davenport had promised to come here to dinner to-morrow night. Hadn't I better tell him not to come?"

"Not a bit of it," said the General after a moment's reflection. "Dick's a nice lad, and there's not the slightest reason for putting off his visit."

"But you must get home early, you know, Jack," said Trev; "it's going to be a white vest affair, I tell you. You wait until you have seen her, old man!"

It came about, therefore, that on the night of the painful scene between Barnes and Peggy, that the Trelawney family were on the tiptoe of expectation and delight, and

the happiest evening the General had known for many months. Especially was he delighted with Mary Penryn. For once, at all events, the lover had not painted in too bright a colour the woman he loved. As Trev had said, she was not a showy girl, but her quiet humour, her love of laughter, her sweetness of disposition, and the love she evidently bore to her father and mother, simply charmed General Trelawney.

"Trev, my boy, go in and win!" he said before the Penryns had been in the house half an hour. "You have my fullest approval and consent."

"Isn't she splendid, Dad?" asked the young fellow.

"She's something better than that; she's a really good girl, and if she says 'yes'—well, you'll have a treasure."

"But I couldn't get it fixed up to-night, could I?"

"Why not?" laughed the General. "I wouldn't wait ten minutes, if I were in your place. Ten minutes? Not two!"

"But Mr. Penryn's old-fashioned, and believes in the *convenances*."

"*Convenances* be hanged," laughed the General. "I'll speak to him. It's all right, my boy, I can see it's all right."

The Trelawneys had arranged for the Penryns to come an hour before dinner, and ten minutes before the dinner gong sounded Trev had managed to be alone with Mary.

Trev Trelawney's proposal was hardly in the nature of a proposal at all, because the young people had tacitly settled the matter beforehand, and were only waiting for the consent of the parents.

"I say, Mary," said Trev eagerly, "Dad's head over heels in love with you. He is really."

"Not so much as I am with him," laughed the girl.

"And your father is agreeable if you are," persisted Trev. "I say, Mary, may I? Will you have me?"

It was all settled, and when the dinner gong sounded and as they took their places at the table the General's eyes were moist and his voice a little husky. As for Mrs. Trelawney, she was sobbing for joy, even although there was some sadness in her sobs because she remembered the two girls who were away.

"I say, Dick," said John to Davenport who had been alone with his friend ever since the latter had arrived, "this is no place for us; we're simply out of it."

"I wish I were *in* it," was Davenport's reply, "if it would make me look as happy as Trev looks. By Jove, he's altogether changed. He's like a new man!"

"What are you two boys laughing at?" asked the General.

"Oh, Dick wants to sing 'It's love that makes the world go round,' and I won't let him," laughed John.

This was the signal for a good deal of light-hearted laughter, and after that everything went merrily.

"I want to give you a toast," said the General towards the end of the dinner.

"A speech, a speech!" shouted John and Davenport together.

"It's not going to be much of a speech: my heart's too full," said the General: "but I can't let this occasion pass without saying a few words. I'm going to ask you to drink the health of these two young people. I have not known Mary two hours yet, but I'm over head and ears in love with her. Perhaps you'll say I'm speaking impulsively, but I'll say this, nevertheless: If I'd searched the world over, I could not have found any one whom I would rather have for Trev's wife. I have not talked with her half an hour all together—Trev wouldn't let me—but I have seen enough. She's a good girl, and a sweet girl, and a girl of which any father might be well proud. After all, it doesn't take long to know people, and I can always tell in five minutes whether I like them

or not, and I'm just in love with Mary; and so is my wife here. And so I say with a full heart, God bless you, my dear. May you be happy. And you, too, my boy—and I trust and believe that you'll be worthy of the dear girl you have won; and—and——" Here the General broke down.

For a moment he stood still, smiling, unable to speak. Then, crossing to Mary's side and putting his arms round her neck, he kissed her. "God bless you, my dear," he said.

"I say, Dad," shouted Trev, almost beside himself with joy, "you are coming it a bit strong, you know. Where do I come in?—that's what I want to know."

Then Mr. Penryn, a bluff squire of the old school, said a few words about Trev, and expressed all sorts of good wishes for him, after which there was general hand shaking.

It was at that moment that the servant entered the room and came to the General.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir," she said.

"Who is it? What is his name?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir."

"Tell him I'm engaged. I can't see him to-night."

"Yes, sir, but he said he came on very important business, *very* important. He said it was very urgent that he should see you, sir, and that he would not keep you more than five minutes."

"Oh, well, then I'll see him. You'll excuse me, Penryn, won't you?"

Then he went out, and met Barnes.

CHAPTER XXVI

JIM'S APPEAL FOR HELP

"WHAT do you want?" repeated the General when Barnes did not reply. "Why have you come here?"

"It's about Peg."

"Yes, what about Peggy?"

"Well, sir, we're in a bit of a hole."

The General looked at Barnes, and a feeling of disgust came over him. He had just left a scene of happiness. He had that night welcomed a prospective daughter-in-law, to whom his heart had gone out at first sight. She was a lady, too, refined and cultured, and he had been very proud and happy. Now as he looked at Barnes, showy, but common to the finger-tips, he felt a kind of nausea. The thought that his daughter could have picked up and married a fellow like this almost maddened him. For the General was a proud man, proud of his name, proud of his associations, proud of an unsullied reputation. He had all the instincts of an English gentleman, and thus to have a fellow like this coming to his house, and telling him that his daughter Peggy was in trouble, almost overwhelmed him. Still he kept himself outwardly calm.

"What have I to do with it?" he asked. "I need not to repeat to you the history of the whole miserable affair, or how I forbade you to seek my daughter's company in any way. You took your own line, you defied me, and now I fail to see what it has to do with me."

"She is your daughter still, General, and she loves you still," said Barnes.

He had rehearsed what he hoped would be the course of the interview, and he determined to make a strong point of this. He felt certain that in spite of the General's anger his love for Peggy was as strong as ever, so he adopted this line of attack: and from his standpoint he was right. There was no more vulnerable point in the General's armour than this, and Barnes saw it.

"Of course, I know we were wrong," he went on, "but we could not help it. I loved Peg and Peg loved me. Of course she was a bit wilful and liked her own way, but at bottom she's terribly fond of you, General."

In spite of the fact that the General knew the fellow was telling lies, his words affected him. So much did he yearn for the love of his child, that the words, spoken even as they were by Barnes, brought tears to his eyes.

"We were as happy as turtle-doves," went on Barnes, seeing the impression he had made, "and we should have got on well but for this money business. You know how dear things are, General, and I'd be the last man in the world to say anything against Peg: but she's not very economical, you know, sir, and she don't know how to manage very well; she wasn't brought up that way. However, I'm not going to blame Peg, I love her too much, but there it is. We're 'up against it.'"

Trelawney felt sure that the fellow was playing a part, and even although his love went out to his child, he could not help hardening his heart. He felt cynical, too, and more than a little bitter.

"Still, again I enquire, what have I to do with it?"

"Perhaps you don't think what a bitter pill this is to me," said Barnes, ignoring the General's question, "especially after the way you treated me, and what you said to me when we met last. Of course it was a mistake, and nobody feels it more than my own people. They

have reproached me again and again for giving up another girl for Peg: nice girl she was, too; had a paying little millinery business of her own, and doing well. Why, if I'd married Agnes Parks I need not to have done a stroke of work. But there, it's no use talking about that. I was in love, and married Peggy."

The General made a motion of disgust. "Yes, and came to me with the proposal that if I would recognize you, you would—would—but I dare not speak of it."

"Oh, no, sir," broke in Barnes, "I can understand that, too: but why did I do it? It was for Peg's sake. I know I tried to deceive you by telling you that we weren't married, but I thought that it was my only way to get your recognition. But it wasn't for myself, it was for Peg. You don't believe me because you don't understand me. But here was our position. We loved each other, and because you put the kybosh on everything, we had to get married without your consent, and I, in order to get your recognition, told you what was not true. I admit it was a mistake, sir; but I did the honourable thing. However, it's no use talking about that. We're in queer street, sir. Say Peg has been a bit extravagant, if you like—I'm not the one to throw up that against her—but I don't know how we're going to live. I thought I should have got an increase of pay, but times have got bad, and I haven't, and now we can't pay our way. We owe three weeks' rent, and Peg is nearly starving."

"Starving!" ejaculated the General.

"Well, we don't know where the next week's food is to come from—and—and there you are! Here's a letter I got, to-day, telling me that if I don't pay up the rent at once, I shall be kicked out. And here are these bills. I'm not come for myself, I could manage all right; but it's Peg: she's breaking her heart. Some might say she's a bit unreasonable. I've offered to take her home

to Camden Town, and live with my mother and sisters, but she won't; she's too proud to associate with them. If she would do that, we might rub along, but if nothing is done for us we will be on the streets."

There was so much truth in this statement that Barnes was able to speak almost convincingly.

"What do you owe?" asked the General. "How much is it?"

"Three weeks' rent at two pounds five a week—that's six pounds fifteen shillings, and there's these other bills that come to eight pounds four shillings, that's nearly fifteen pounds. I would not come for myself; it's Peg I'm troubling about."

"You should have thought of it before you did this mad, dishonourable thing."

"I know I should, and I'm downright sorry, but what's done is done. Besides, it's harder to live than I thought: prices are going up like mad, and Peg's nearly out of her head."

"But why have you come to me?" the General could not help saying.

"Come to you, sir!" cried Barnes, with a show of righteous indignation. "Because I didn't think you were made of stone. What I said to Peg to-night was, that if you'd allow us, say two pound a week—we don't ask much, you see—we might rub along."

The General did not reply. The whole affair was so sordid, so piteous that he could not. Never did he despise the fellow as he despised him now. He saw through the mask he was wearing, understood the tones of his voice, and loathed his presence. But he could not close his heart against his child. He could not bear to think of her being in want. He realized the kind of furnished rooms which could be had for two pounds a week, and felt what Peggy must be suffering by living in them. He knew that Barnes had moved from the

place where their last interview took place, and had been informed of the part of the city where they now lived: a common, unsavoury, and squalid quarter.

"Come now, General," and Barnes, as he thought he saw the other relenting, spoke eagerly, "can't you, for Peg's sake, let bygones be bygones? Why can't we live happy together? What's the use of keeping up this bitterness? Whatever you may say, I'm your son-in-law. Why can't you do the Christian thing and own it? Why can't we be friendly like? I'll not disgrace you. I was an officer in the army just as you are, and I could pass muster with any of your fine friends: and I ask you straight, can you, a professedly Christian man, shut your daughter, and the man she has chosen, out of your heart and home?

"I mean to get on, and when things have settled down a bit I'll make my way. Peg shall have her motor car and her fine dresses with the best of 'em. But just now we're under water, and Peg's heart is breaking. What we want is just a little help in money and a little love and sympathy. I'm willing to forgive all the hard things you've said to me, and it seems to me that it's your duty to forgive anything which I have said in a temper—and I'll admit I've got my pride same as you have—that might hurt you. Now then, General, here's my hand on it."

Barnes imagined this was a very moving speech. He had thought it out while walking from the subway station to the Trelawney home, and he expected a great deal from it. The General had been brought up in an old-fashioned school and had always maintained the sacredness of marriage ties. He loathed the thought of easy divorces, and had always held that people once married took each other until death parted them. If that were so, his child's husband had become, in a very sacred way, his son, and in spite of the loathing he felt for Barnes the fact struck home now.

Perhaps this revealed itself in his features, for Barnes, who had been watching him closely, went on eagerly.

"Yes, I can see you hate me," he said, "but hatred is not a Christian thing, General. 'To err is human but to forgive is divine,' and what I ask is: can't you forgive us?"

Again the keen eyes of the older man pierced the mask of the other, but still he hesitated.

"I must think about it," he said, half unconsciously.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. "May I come in, Dad?" and Trev entered the room. "Dick Davenport said he must be going, sir, and I thought you might like to speak to him before he went."

This was perfectly true, but it was not the only reason why Trev interrupted them. He had an idea that his father had a visitor whom he wanted to get rid of, and as they wanted the General back with them badly, he thought he might help him by going to him. Besides, the five minutes, which the servant mentioned, were far more than up.

"I'm sorry, Trev, that I can't speak to Davenport just now. Will you tell him that I'm engaged, and ask him to come again soon—and will you come back here for a minute?"

Trev gave a quick searching glance at his father's face and then looked towards Barnes. He had a suspicion that something was wrong.

"Certainly, Dad." He left the room as he spoke, but returned a minute later.

"This," said the General, "is the man I told you about."

"What, the fellow who—who?"

"Yes," said the General.

The young officer looked at Barnes intently and quickly summed him up.

"Lieutenant Trelawney, I believe," said Barnes.

"Glad to see you. Yes, in a way we're relations," and he giggled nervously as he held out his hand: but Trev did not take it: instead he looked at his father as if for further information.

"It's the old story," said the General a little bitterly, and then in a few words he described the purport of Barnes' visit.

"And he wants you to receive him here as your son-in-law," and every tone of his voice was a sting, a sting which even Barnes felt.

"Yes, and I *am* his son-in-law, too, and your brother-in-law! You can't get over that!" blustered Barnes, whose temper was rising. "I suppose you don't want to see your sister going out charing, do you?"

"Father, shall I kick him out of the house?" asked Trev. "I will, if you'll let me."

"Come, none of that!" cried Barnes. "Two can play at that game!"

"Wait a minute," said the General; "there's Peg to consider. I must think and I must consult your mother."

"But, Dad, you couldn't let that bounder come here! Think of Mary!"

"Yes, I am thinking of her, my boy, and I'm thinking of Peg, too." He walked to the door as he spoke and opened it. "There, you can go now," he said, looking at Barnes.

"Do you mean to say you'll do nothing, then? Why, it's downright cruel, and unchristian."

"That's not your affair."

"Look here, I've come to you straight, and I've eaten humble pie because of your daughter, but if anything happens to her, don't you blame me, that's all!"

"This way, please." And Barnes, noting the look in the General's eyes, left the room and walked towards the front door, followed by Trev.

When he had reached the drive he found Trev by his

side. "Now, Mr. Barnes, remember," and there was an intensity in the young fellow's voice, "I know all about you,—my brother told me. Yes, I've heard of that affair at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. You lied then; I expect you have been lying to-night; but I shall make it my business to find out the truth, and if anything is wrong I'll not let you off as easily as my brother did, remember that. Now get out."

Barnes walked some distance in a black rage, yet fearful all the same. He could not understand these people. They seemed to possess a power which took all the fight out of him. His blustering was all in vain, his pleading useless. He made an exclamation in two words, which was to the effect that he had given up all hope of salvation. "But I must be careful," he reflected presently. "After all, he may do something, and I must not put Peg's back up until all hope is gone."

When the General returned to the drawing-room he found that Davenport had gone, and thus only his own family and the Penryns were there. For a little time he seemed distrait, as though he had something upon his mind which he did not know how to express. Then a flash of resolution came into his eyes.

"I have something to say to you," he said slowly. "Something that is painful, very painful."

"Then don't say it, my friend," replied Mr. Penryn.

"But I must," said the General. "It affects you in a way. You became a member of my family from to-night, and because your girl and my boy are engaged you have the right to know, and it's my duty to tell you."

"Not that! not that, Lester!" cried Mrs. Trelawney piteously, for Trev had told her who his father's visitor was.

"Yes," replied the General, "I must. I have always believed in absolute frankness, and this is not a matter

can earn enough for his bread-and-cheese: but Peg is different. She is my child."

"Of course," said Mr. Penryn. "You can't help your daughter without, at the same time, helping Barnes too."

"I see that;—and I must help her. I simply can't see my child in want."

"But we can't have that fellow here, Dad," cried Trev. "I—I wouldn't let Mary know him! One must have *some* self-respect, you know."

"What kind of a fellow is he?" asked Mr. Penryn.

The General sketched him perfectly, yet justly. He made plain to the other the kind of pushing, half-educated fellow, who thought it a fine thing to be an officer, and who had all sorts of puffed-up ideas as to how a gentleman should behave, but who, in spite of everything, revealed the real texture of his character. A vulgar fellow who by his showy good looks and fine physique was calculated to capture an impulsive, unthinking girl, but who had not even a nodding acquaintance with the first principles of honour. A snob, a bounder, and a bully combined, who, under the veneer of a cheap education, tried to pose as a gentleman.

"Yes," continued the General, "and then, Penryn—then——? It's a ghastly problem to me, as you may imagine. I am as sure as that two and two make four, that Peggy, in spite of her stubbornness and wilfulness and rebelliousness; in spite of the fact that she has cared for this man, in a way, will sooner or later understand the kind of fellow he is, and detest him. She will feel that his very touch is an insult. What then? Does a ceremony in a registry office, or in a church for that matter, make them man and wife? I know I have very strict views about marriage, but this business has made me think furiously. Isn't marriage dead when all respect, all honour, all love are gone? But there, we'll

"I agree with John," cried Trev. "You could not do it, Dad, you simply couldn't. Why, think of Mary having to—to——" and he looked tenderly at the girl who had become engaged to him that night. "Why, Mary, if you saw him—a common, vulgar bounder, you'd understand me!"

Mary Penryn did not speak. There had been a strange look in her eyes, while the General had told his story: a look of yearning and tenderness, and pity, and something more. She rose from her chair and went to Mrs. Trelawney.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered in her ear, "so very sorry. Oh, what you must have felt!" and she kissed her affectionately.

"I want to do what's right, Penryn," said the General. "I would be the last to do anything that would weaken the meaning of marriage. But can I, ought I, to welcome that fellow to my house? Ought I to admit him here as my son-in-law under any pretext? I ask you as a Christian man."

"No," remarked Mr. Penryn after a long silence.

"Ought I to help them?" went on the General. "When I last saw Peggy she was still unrepentant, still defiant. Her mother wrote to her telling her that our doors were open to her, but that we could not receive that man, and her reply was that she wanted neither our help nor our recognition, and that she proposed to live independently of us. She also told her mother that her doors would be shut against us. I'm sorry to have to say this, Penryn, on this night of all others; but I want to be absolutely open with you, and—and I want your advice. I want to help my child—I *must* help her—but in helping her, I am helping her husband. Ought I to do that? He's a great, strong, coarse individual; he can make his way well enough—that is, he

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HOME OF THE BARNES

PEGGY stood in the shabby little room, miserable, ashamed, yet angry and defiant.

It was now past ten in the morning, and Barnes had gone to his work. The breakfast things had not yet been cleared away, and the room looked even worse than usual. When she saw her father and mother she instinctively rushed to the door to let them in; but when they stood within the room, and she realized the sordid squalor of her surroundings, a flush of angry shame swept over her. For a moment the tears rushed to her eyes, and a sob caught in her throat, but she quickly mastered herself. She remembered what she had said to her father the day before she left her home. She caught herself thinking of their last interview, when they had come to the rooms to which Barnes had first brought her.

Her old pride surged back in her. Her old sense of defiance dominated her. Poor as she was, miserable as she might be, squalid as were her surroundings, she would not let her father see any weakness in her. She would hold by the bargain she had made. She would not admit that she had made a mistake.

Barnes had not told her where he had been on the previous night. When he had returned, very late, he had not spoken to her, and that morning he had been sullen and out of temper. He had given dark hints as to what would happen if something did not turn up, but he made no direct statement as to what had taken place. She was, therefore, ignorant as to how her father and mother had

earnt her whereabouts and knew nothing of Barnes' visit.

"I could not help coming to you, my little girl," said the General. "You are in trouble, aren't you?"

She did not reply but looked at him silently, defiantly.

"Now tell us all about it," went on her father. "Let us hear about your difficulties."

"What difficulties?"

"The difficulties he—the man—you married—told me about last night."

"Told you last night! What do you mean?"

"Didn't you know he came to Hampstead?"

There was a quick flash in the girl's eyes. Instinctively she understood what had taken place,—that Barnes had been to her father to appeal for help, and she felt more humiliated than ever.

"My darling, I'm so sorry; tell us all about it," cried Mrs. Trelawney.

"There's nothing to tell," replied the girl. "I'm not complaining."

"But—but," pleaded Mrs. Trelawney, "surely, Peg, my darling, you'll tell your old mother."

"I'm sorry he went to you," said the girl doggedly. "I knew nothing about it. He had no right to bother you."

"But, my dear, we can't know of your trouble and not come to you."

"I don't see why not. I took my own course. I forfeited all claims upon you when I left home. I must bear my own burden."

The girl's spirit was unbroken. A proud look still flashed from her eyes. She might suffer, but she would suffer in silence as far as they were concerned. Never would she willingly admit that she had made a mistake.

"But he told us that you were in debt—almost starving."

"He told you that, did he?"

"That's why we came," said the General. "You are still our little kiddie, Peggy."

Again the tears rushed into her eyes. The touch of tenderness well-nigh broke her down, but again she steeled herself and became defiant.

"I ask for no pity," she said.

"Won't you come back with us and spend the day at home?" pleaded her mother. "We will bring you back here in time for your—your—husband's dinner."

"You'll not let *him* come home, then?"

The question flashed from her with the suddenness of a pistol shot.

They were both silent. They had made up their minds on this question.

"I see! He's not good enough for you! I may come home, but not he!"

Still they remained silent, but they stood looking at her, and she could not help seeing the love that shone from their eyes.

The girl understood. She saw what was in her father's mind as plainly as if he had spoken. She knew that he regarded Barnes as a vulgar outsider, a man with whom he would not willingly associate, one who was low-bred and contemptible. And she knew they were right; but she would not give in. Something within her rose in defiance of her father's feeling. She saw Barnes almost as they saw him, but something, she could not tell what, made her loyal to him. She would tell them nothing of his brutality, of his meanness, of the things he had said to her.

"If he is not good enough to come to your house, *I* am not good enough."

For a moment the General was nonplussed. He could not help admiring her loyalty to the man whose unworthiness he was sure she realized. He was a man

of quick understanding and he knew the kind of things he would say to her, knew of the reproaches with which he would taunt her. But she would not admit them to him.

"But, Peggy, my darling, we want to help you," cried the mother.

"I don't want your help."

"But he told your father that you would be thrown into the streets if something was not done."

"Then I'll be thrown into the streets."

"But we want you, Peggy," and there was a tremor in General Trelawney's voice. "Do you know Trev's home? and—and—he's engaged!"

The girl became interested in a moment.

"Trev home! Engaged! To whom?"

"To the sweetest girl I ever met!" cried the General. "He met her in Ireland. Her name's Mary Penryn. She and her people were at our house last night. We all fell in love with her right away. And Trev is such a changed fellow. You never saw such a difference in a boy. The Penryns are a Cornish family. They have a place—it is little more than a farm—just outside Falmouth, and they're awfully nice people!"

"And she?—what's she like? Is she good-looking?"

"Perhaps some might not call her so," replied her father, "but she's such a sweet, unselfish, good girl!"

The words made her realize where she was, what she had done, and again the look of defiance came back. She wanted to see Trev's *fiancée* more than words could say, for blood was thicker than water, and in her own way she had always been fond of Trev, but her father's words were a reproach.

"Sweet, unselfish, good!" she sneered. "I suppose she's one of the pious sort?"

"Yes," replied the General quietly, "she is. She says nothing *about it, but* she is. If Trev had searched the

world over he could not have found any one who would have pleased me more."

The girl did not speak a word, but looked out of the window on the dirty, dismal street with unseeing eyes.

"If you'll come home," said the mother, "I'm sure Trev will go and bring her to meet you. He doesn't need any excuse to be with her, I can tell you," and she laughed as she spoke.

"No," replied Peg, "I don't want to see her. Of course you've told her all about me, and I don't want to be introduced to my new sister as the bad girl of the family. For that matter, I'm *not* the bad girl of the family. I've only done what I felt it my right to do. Have you seen Eleanor lately?"

"No," replied Mrs. Trelawney with a sigh, "we have not."

"Is there any use your waiting here longer?" asked Peggy after an awkward silence. "This kind of thing doesn't make me any happier, and I don't suppose it's very pleasant for you. I'm not penitent a bit. I'm just the same as ever I was. I'm not going home to be pitied by the servants, and—and patronized. Besides—I have my duty to my husband." She said this as a kind of afterthought, and she flung the words at her father almost insolently.

"Very well, Peg," said the General, "then there's no more to be said. Except this:—we want to help you if we can."

"I refuse your help. I won't accept anything. If you won't recognize Jim, I don't want your help."

"Do you think I can recognize him?" asked the General quietly. "Would you, Peg, like me to have him in my house and introduce him as the husband you have chosen?"

Perhaps there was something more in her father's tones than in his words that helped the girl to see what

his feelings were, and although she wanted to answer in the affirmative she could not. Something kept back the words.

"Yet we want to help *you*, my little girl," went on the General tenderly.

"And I don't want to be helped."

"Then we may as well go, Alice. Good-morning, my dear. Please remember that your parents' house is always open to *you*." In spite of himself he could not help the emphasis which, almost unconsciously, he laid on the last word.

Peggy watched them go; saw them get into the motor car which stood near the door, and drive away. Then she stood for a long time motionless; her mind far away. She was thinking about a thousand things she could not put into words. Presently she realized that there was a packet on the table, and almost listlessly she looked at it. It was a long envelope, and in her father's handwriting she saw the words "For Peggy." Eagerly she opened it; at that moment she forgot all her pride and her stubbornness; forgot, too, that sense of defiance which she was glad she had maintained. The envelope contained the letter from the landlord of the house telling them that if the rent was not paid they would be forthwith ejected. It also contained the bills which Barnes had shown her the night before. These Barnes had left at the General's house. She saw at a glance that the bills were receipted, and that the account for the rent was settled. Then she caught sight of another envelope on which was written the words "With Dad's and Mother's love." It contained several pound notes.

In spite of herself her lips quivered, and again her eyes became flooded with tears. She stood for some time holding the notes in her hand as if undecided what to do with them. Pride, defiance, tenderness, hunger, were all expressed in her eyes. Her father had helped her in

spite of herself. The rent was paid, the bills were settled, and he had left her money. She saw the meaning of it. Her father still loved her, and although in helping her he was obliged to help Barnes, he would help him as little as possible. He would not recognize their marriage, but his heart went out to her. Then the floodgates of her misery were opened, and throwing herself upon the shabby, greasy lodging-house chair, she burst into heart-breaking sobs.

Barnes did not come home to lunch that day, but at half-past six in the evening he appeared with a look half of fear, half of expectation in his eyes. For in spite of the mountebank bravado which he exhibited before her, the man was afraid of her. She did not speak on his arrival, but laid his evening meal before him without a word.

"Nice, loving welcome, anyhow," said Barnes presently. "Aren't you going to have any dinner?"

"I'm not hungry."

"What's the matter?" he snarled.

"*That's* your pride, I suppose?" and there was a sneer in her voice.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. You went to my father last night and told him about the rent; and the bills that had not been paid."

"Has he been here?" asked Barnes eagerly. "What did he say?"

She took the receipted accounts from the envelope and flung them before him.

"There!" she said, and there was infinite scorn in her voice.

Barnes looked at them eagerly and noted that the bills were receipted.

"That's something, anyhow," he muttered in tones of satisfaction. "But is that all, Peg? Didn't he give you

anything—else? Tell me all about it. What did he say?"

"He said enough to make me ashamed."

"Oh, what's the use of talking like that? We can't live on air. But surely this is not all. He gave you some money, didn't he?"

"I told him I would not have any," replied Peg. "I didn't know he'd paid these things until he'd gone. I never felt so humiliated in my life."

"Do you mean to say he offered you money and you wouldn't take it? Why, you bloomin' idiot, can't you see that——?"

He caught his wife's eyes as he spoke, and in spite of his anger the sentence hung on his lips unfinished.

"After all, what's this?" he went on presently; "the next week's rent will be due on Saturday, and then, what are we going to do? If, instead of paying these things, he'd given you the money it would have been something like. I could have held a part of these bills over for a few weeks, and we should have had something to go on with."

"You mean that you would not have paid your debts?"

"You can bet your shoes I wouldn't have paid them until I was obliged. But did he come alone?"

"No, my mother came with him."

"And you didn't ask them for any money?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, of all the blithering fools! Why, you might easily have got a twenty-pound note out of them, but for your infernal pride. Did they say anything about your going home?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"They wanted to take me back with them."

"And *you wouldn't* go?"

"No."

"Well, of all the——"

Barnes' indignation and wonder seemed to be so great that he could not finish the sentence.

"Why didn't you go?"

"Because I didn't want to."

"Did they say anything about me?"

"Not much."

"But they said something. What was it?"

"They said they would have me, but they would not have you."

"And what was your reply?"

"I told them that if you were not good enough to be received there I wasn't."

Barnes was silent a few seconds. Even he understood something of what was in the girl's mind.

"Do you think they will ever relent, Peg?" he asked, presently.

"No, they never will."

"A nice Christian he is," sneered Barnes. "A nice forgiving Christian gentleman, isn't he? He'll not have his own son-in-law in his house. Dirty pride. He's no gentleman, Peg. He may be a General and all that kind of thing, but he's no gentleman, my girl."

The girl's anger was aroused in spite of herself.

"Of course you would say that," she remarked.

"Why shouldn't I say it? It's true, isn't it?"

"No, it's not true."

"Then what do you mean by talking like that?"

"Because you don't know what a gentleman is."

She was angry with herself as she spoke. She felt that she was becoming more and more common the longer she lived with this man, felt that she was sinking to his level, and yet she could not help herself.

"Look here, none of that!" cried Barnes, starting to his feet. "I'm not going to be insulted."

"Very well, then, you shouldn't ask me questions. Yes, hit me if you like. But you dare not! You're afraid!"

He flung himself into his chair again and went on with his dinner.

"Did they tell you that your brother, Trev, was home?"

"Yes."

"He's on leave, I suppose?"

"Yes. He brought home his *fiancée*."

"Oh, I see. Some swell dame, I suppose? Of course she *could* come home, but I'm not good enough. Who is she?"

"Her name is Penryn. She comes of an old Cornish family."

"Old Cornish family, eh! No wonder the country is turning Bolshevist. I shall turn Bolshevik myself soon. It would do me good to see some of those proud-stomached aristocrats thrown into the streets."

Peg did not reply.

For some time after this, there was a silence. Barnes was evidently thinking deeply.

"I'm going out," he said at length.

The girl did not speak.

"You don't ask me where I'm going, but I'll tell you. I'm going to get a little pleasure, a little comfort. Fat lot of comfort I get in my own home with a wife who won't be reasonable."

Still Peggy kept silence.

"Have you nothing to say?"

"I was only wondering where I should go when you had gone."

"Oh, you can go where you like—I don't care."

A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness rushed over her, and in spite of all she could do she burst into a flood of sobbing.

"What's the use of that?" asked Barnes. "If you were reasonable we might get on, even yet."

"Reasonable! What do you mean?"

"Well, we're in a hole. While rents are as they are, we can't live in this way; there must be a change. If we are to stay together, there are only two courses open to us."

"Yes, what are they?"

"One is, that you'll get your old man to help us."

"Oh, Jim," she cried, "I can't, I simply can't! Think of the way I left them. Think of the promises you made me, and then ask yourself how I can go back to them, and—and —— No, I can't do it, I really can't. I'll do anything in reason. Let's get out of London, let's go into the country, somewhere, and take a little cottage. I'll work like a slave, I'll do anything, but don't ask me to accept charity in—in that way."

"Catch me leaving London!" cried Barnes. "Catch Jim Barnes getting away from everything that makes life worth living. Besides, you talk like a fool. How can I get anything to do in the country?"

"What is the other thing you have in your mind?" asked the girl.

"Why, if you'd consent to go to Camden Town and live with Mother we could save practically all our rent. That would make two pounds a week difference to us. We could just manage then."

"But—but could we have our own rooms? Need we live with the family?"

"I dare say that could be managed," replied Barnes quickly. He saw signs of yielding in Peggy's face, and was pleased accordingly.

"But you must put on no airs, you know, and you'll have to help Mother with the work."

"I don't mind work. I don't mind anything," cried the girl, "but I do want to maintain my self-respect."

"Well, there's some sense in that," said Barnes somewhat mollified, "and I'll go up and talk with Mother right away. But you are an awful fool, Peg. Your father could give you three or four pounds a week without knowing it was gone, and we could be as happy as turtle-doves."

A week later Peg found herself installed at 15, Primrose Terrace, Camden Town. It had cost her a good deal to consent, but consented she had, and for a few days after she had taken up her abode there, she felt happier. She did her best to be agreeable to Barnes' two sisters, Edith and Emily, while even Mrs. Barnes was mollified at her evident endeavour to be pleasant.

"Yes," said Mrs. Barnes to a neighbour, to whom she had given a glowing account of Peggy's advent, "my son has brought 'is wife 'ome, and as you may say, Mrs. Simpkins. She 'as brought a new interest to my life. She is a dear little thing, and, of course, a perfect lady."

"I 'ear 'er father is a General," said Mrs. Simpkins.

"Yes," said Mrs. Barnes, "and will soon be made a barrinet or perhaps a lord. Of course it's a very 'igh family. Oh, it was a perfect love match, Mrs. Simpkins."

"Well, I 'ope it will turn out all right," remarked Mrs. Simpkins with a sniff.

"I 'ope so, I'm sure," replied Mrs. Barnes, "and of course she fair worships the ground Jim stands on."

"Well, I don't think much of these fine matches. After all, she can't be much of a wife to 'im. I'll warrant she's never done a day's work in her life, and doesn't know how to cook a dinner."

"Of course no lady would," was Mrs. Barnes' reply.

"Then what good is she as a wife? What's the use of marrying into a 'igh family if you get no benefit from it? Now, if the General was to allow her, say, four

pound a week, there'd be something in it; but there, I suppose he was not agreeable to the match."

"My dear Mrs. Simpkins, it's all the other way. He was delighted with our Jim."

"Then why didn't they go to 'Ampstead to live?" asked Mrs. Simpkins. "You say the General lives in a big house; why shouldn't they lodge there instead of with you?"

"Ah, my dear," and Mrs. Barnes gave a knowing smile, "you don't know our Jim. He's a regular Barnes, he is; proud as Lucifer. 'Jim,' says the General to 'im, 'you come and live with me; my 'ouse is open to you.' But Jim wouldn't. 'No, General,' he says, 'I've got me pride, I have, and I'll not accept charity from any one.' That's why he wouldn't take an allowance. But, of course, Emily and Edith will go up to 'Ampstead sometimes, and very likely Lady Trelawney will come to see me."

"I shall believe that when I see it," sniffed Mrs. Simpkins.

"What, you don't believe me?" cried Mrs. Barnes indignantly. "Didn't you see the General and his son come 'ere the very day they was married? Oh, yes, I know it was a runaway marriage, and no doubt the Trelawneys were a bit angry at the time: but that was before they knew my Jim. What the General said to me that morning was this—'What's done can't be undone, Mrs. Barnes, and I 'ope the two families will be friendly,' he says. You'll see, Mrs. Simpkins, you'll see."

In spite of this and similar conversations, however, Mrs. Barnes was greatly chagrined at Peggy's insistent refusals to appeal to her parents for help.

"What I say is this," she said to her one night, "if you love Jim as you ought to, you'll do everything you can for him, that's what I say. What's the use of having

silly pride like that? It isn't as though your parents couldn't afford it."

"Jim told me before we were married that he had no need of my father's help," was her reply.

"Oh, that's all my eye; young people talk like that without thinking. And I tell you this, Jim won't stand it forever, you know. I'll admit you're not a bad looking girl, but good looks don't last long, and you're not as pretty as you were when Jim knew you first."

Peggy realized this with a sense of bitterness; realized, too, that her clothes were becoming shabby, and that she saw no means of buying new ones.

"Of course," went on Mrs. Barnes, "we were all pleased when Jim told us about you at first; but we naturally thought that your father, when he came home, would be sensible. It isn't as though Jim were a common young man; he might have married well, he might. And when he threw up Agnes Parks for you, I gave 'im a piece of my mind."

"Gave up Agnes Parks for me? What do you mean?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" and Mrs. Barnes laughed meaningly. "Did you think you were the first girl that Jim ever kissed? Why, he's had dozens of them, my dear, and Agnes Parks was a good chance, too. She has a nice little millinery business of her own and makes good money. What I says is, it's very hard for a young man to give up a girl with money, and to marry somebody who hasn't got a penny and who is too proud to get it."

"I'm not too proud," replied Peggy. "I have tried to get work."

Mrs. Barnes laughed sneeringly.

"Tried to get work! Yes, but what good are you? It's all very well to say you went to munitions and made good money before the war was over; that's no good now, *you know*. You're not fit for nothing, and that's

her sister would come to her on the following Sunday afternoon.

"May Eleanor come to see us?" cried Barnes when she informed him of her letter. "Of course she may, mayn't she, Mother?"

"I suppose so," was Mrs. Barnes' reply, "but she must take us as we are. However, I expect that will be all right, seeing as how she works for her living the same as other people, and I've never been the one to keep up ill feeling between the two families."

During the next two days, Mrs. Barnes was more than ordinarily gracious to Peggy, and even went so far as to make special purchases at a local confectioner's in honour of Eleanor's coming.

Winter was now upon them, and the days were cold and drear, and if there was one spot more depressing than another in the whole of Camden Town, it was Primrose Terrace. A cold, gray mist wrapped the whole neighbourhood like a mantle, and Mrs. Barnes complained that the gas Peggy used in her room would drive her to the poorhouse.

On the Sunday afternoon when Eleanor was expected, Peggy sat in her bedroom alone. She had drawn the chair to the window and was watching every passer-by with eagerness. The thought of her sister coming to see her was like a ray of sunshine on a dark day. Never had she realized how dear her own flesh and blood were to her.

At length she saw her coming down the street, and then with an eagerness of which she did not believe herself capable, she rushed down-stairs and ran towards the door.

"Oh, Eleanor!" she cried, "I *am* glad you've come. This way! Quick! Let us get up-stairs before they see us."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ELEANOR VISITS PEGGY

WHEN they reached Peggy's bedroom the two sisters looked at each other for some time without speaking. It seemed as though a barrier stood between them, a barrier that both were afraid to pull down.

"I hope you're not cold," said Peggy presently. "There's a fire down-stairs, but I wanted to have you a few minutes to myself."

"I don't mind the cold," replied Eleanor. "Is anything the matter, Peggy? Why have you come here to live?"

"I'll tell you all about that presently," replied the girl, "but I want to know about you. These Barnes girls have been saying all sorts of horrible things about you. They aren't true, are they?"

"I don't know what they have been saying," replied her sister, "but there's nothing that you need to trouble about."

"Are you still at Speke and Burnham's?"

"No," replied the girl. "I've got another place."

"Where?"

"At another firm in the city."

"Good pay?"

"The same as I had before."

"And that girl, Chellew isn't she called?—she's not living with you, is she? Emily Barnes says —— But I won't tell you."

"No; she's gone away," replied Eleanor calmly. "But another girl lives with me now—one who is in the same office."

"Is she nice?"

"She's rather colourless, and altogether uninteresting, but she's all right. Tell me about yourself. Why have you come here to live?"

A flush mounted Peggy's cheeks.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so miserable!"

"Tell me about it."

"Jim said we could not afford to live in a place of our own, and—and it's too horrible to think about."

"Why? Aren't they kind to you?"

"It's not that so much. They seem to have different feelings. They don't understand, you know; but there, I'm glad to have you. They'll be calling us down to tea in a few minutes, but I just wanted to get you up here alone first. Have you heard from Father and Mother?"

"Not often," replied Eleanor; "they came to see me soon after I left home. I told you about that. They've written to me twice since, and I replied that I preferred to stay where I was, and to be alone. Then John wrote asking if he might come to see me, and I told him 'no.'"

Peggy gave a quivering sigh. "Do you know Trev's home?" she asked. "He's engaged."

"Is he? Do we know the girl?"

"No; but they say she's wonderful."

"How do you know?"

"They came to see me—that is, Father and Mother did, before I came here."

"Tell me about it!" cried Eleanor eagerly. "Why did they come to see you? Did they say anything about me?"

Then Peggy, unable to contain herself further, told her sister the story of the past few months.

"And they asked you to go home?"

"Yes, and oh, I did so long to go!"

"Why didn't you?"

"Would you? How could I? They refused to have anything to do with Jim. They have insulted him again and again, and after what I had said to them, I *could* not."

"I wish you'd let me know how poor you were," said Eleanor presently. "I would have helped you."

"But I thought you had only just enough to pay your way?"

"Yes, but I would have managed to help you, somehow."

"Would you? Oh, but I could not take anything. I couldn't really. I say, Eleanor, it hasn't been a great success, has it?"

Eleanor was silent.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" asked Peggy presently.

Still the other girl did not speak.

"Oh, you need not be afraid to tell me," and Peggy noted her sister's looks. "I know what you feel. You never liked Jim, I know, and now it's worse than ever."

"Do you still like him?" asked Eleanor. "Is he kind to you?"

"Of course he's kind to me," lied Peggy in an attempt to be loyal, "and of course I'm fond of him, but——"

"Yes?"

"It's being here," the girl almost sobbed. "His mother and sisters are just awful. Sometimes I think they mean to be kind, but they don't understand. They seem to think that Father and Mother should come to see them, and should make Jim an allowance. They laugh at what they call my pride because I won't write home for help. If I could only get away! If—if we two could be together! But you have told me nothing

about yourself, and I want to know. Do you see much of Tamsin Cory now?"

"No."

"Why not? Have you quarrelled?"

"I don't see anything of her, anyhow."

"Do you go to the Amazon Club?"

"No, I haven't been for a long time."

"Why?"

"I haven't, that's all."

"Oh, Eleanor, I do wish I could go home."

"Why don't you?"

"I can't. You *know* I can't. I could not leave Jim and—they won't have him. I say, couldn't we manage to live together? You say you have a fairly good salary, and if Jim could find a cheap place, couldn't you come and live with us? We might manage then."

"I must think about it," replied Eleanor after a long silence. "Perhaps it might be managed."

"I know you don't like Jim," persisted Peggy, "but I wish you could! I would do anything to get away from these people here. It's not only Jim's sisters, but their young men who come to see them:—they're simply awful. They expect me to laugh at their jokes and to be friendly with them; but I can't—I simply can't. You'll see them presently, and then you'll understand. There, tea is ready; Mrs. Barnes is coming for us."

"Come now, you two girls," said Mrs. Barnes entering the room, "tea is ready. How are you, Miss Trelawney?" holding out her hand to Eleanor. "Glad to see you, I'm sure. I expected you to come here a lot after Jim and your sister were married. I'm not the one to bear malice. I say let's be friends; but come down right away—tea's all on the table and I don't keep it after five o'clock to please nobody, especially on a Sunday afternoon."

Evidently the occasion was intended to be an important

one. A round table, too large for the room, had been placed in the centre of what they called their drawing-room, and was covered with a large amount of eatables. Chairs were drawn up all round it as if for a large party.

No sooner had Eleanor and Peggy come down, than Emily and Edith Barnes, followed by their swains, came out of the back room, while Jim Barnes stood at the foot of the stairs waiting to receive them.

"Hello, Eleanor!" cried Barnes, with great show of heartiness. "Now this is what I call something like. I'm sure I'm pleased to see you. How are you? What, not one kiss for your brother-in-law? Come now, I say, I must salute my sister with a brotherly kiss," and Barnes put his hand on her shoulder as if to carry his words into effect.

"Yes, and why not?" said Mrs. Barnes as Eleanor drew away. "I'm sure nothing could be more natural. My husband's brother, Andrew Barnes, he was a clerk in a surveyor's office, he was, always came to see us twice a week after we were married, and he never failed to kiss me. I should have thought it funny if he hadn't."

"Nothing doing, Jim?" cried Emily's swain, a young man who rejoiced in the name of Sam Pilling. "I say, that's too bad."

Sam Pilling was Emily Barnes' latest conquest. Both the young men who were at Primrose Terrace on the night General Trelawney first returned from abroad, had long since been forgotten.

"But I think the young lady's quite right," went on Pilling. "Kissing ain't for public, I say. It's a private affair. What do you say, Miss Trelawney?"

"Well, kissing or no kissing," interposed Mrs. Barnes, "it's tea time, and I hate tea when it's over-brewed, or when it gets cold. Over-brewed tea always gives me indigestion; as for cold tea, it's just 'orrible. There, now

sit down. The table is rather small for so many of us, so you'll have to squeeze up."

"Not the slightest objection to squeezing, Mrs. Barnes," laughed Pilling. "Indeed, I think it's O. K. There now, we're all snug and comfortable. Plenty of room, haven't you, Miss Trelawney? Tell me if I'm squeezing you too tight."

At this there was a general titter, although Emily Barnes was much annoyed that Pilling should have chosen to sit beside Eleanor instead of herself.

"Eleanor won't mind," remarked Emily when the laugh had subsided. "Will you?"

The girl was saved the pain of answering by Mrs. Barnes asking in a loud voice who would, and who would not, have sugar.

"Look here, Mother," said Barnes after that lady had finished pouring out tea, "this cake and stuff is all very well, but both Pilling and Leatherhead have come all the way from Balham, and they'll be a bit peckish. Haven't you got anything more substantial?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Barnes cheerfully, "I boiled a bit of 'am, yesterday, and it's on the sideboard in the other room. If anybody would like to have a bit of 'am, say so. Will you, Eleanor, my dear? Make yourself quite at home; you're one of the family, and I'm not going to call you Miss Trelawney any more. Jim," shouted Mrs. Barnes to her son, who had gone to cut the ham, "there is some mustard in the cupboard, and pepper and salt, too, if anybody wants it; but I'm afraid it's too much of a crush to have the pickles out."

"Aren't you having any ham, Miss Trelawney?" asked Pilling, who was vigorously plying his knife and fork. His people originally came from Yorkshire, where what they call "high teas" are common.

Eleanor replied in the negative.

"Oh, well, London ways are all very well," remarked

Pilling, "but give me old Yorkshire. It may be a bit rough up there, but we know what's what."

In her endeavour to be agreeable Eleanor entered into conversation with Pilling, who seemed to find her company vastly entertaining. Indeed, he became so interested in what Eleanor said that he paid but little attention to Emily Barnes on the other side of the table. As a consequence, that lady became jealous. In addition, she had anything but kindly feelings towards Eleanor. She remembered the conversation between them on Hampstead Heath some time before, which had rankled ever since.

"She thinks she's honouring us by being here to tea," she reflected, "but I'll pay her out before long."

"Now this is what I like," remarked Mrs. Barnes presently. "All the children 'ome and everybody 'appy. Yes, I know things are terribly dear, but dear as they are, I 'ope everybody will have a good meal. That's what my poor husband used to say when people came in to have a bite with us. 'Cut and come again,' was his motto. Ah, but things are different now from what they were then."

"I say," said Leatherhead, who, sitting next to Edith Barnes, was enjoying himself vastly, "couldn't the whole lot of us do a theatre to-morrow night? Come now, Mrs. Barnes, couldn't you shut up the house for one evening? There's a good piece on at the Lyceum and nothing would please me better than to pay for two or three seats. What do you say, Pilling?"

"I'm game," said Pilling, "and I've heard the play's a good one. Plenty of fighting and spying, and mystery; that's the sort of thing I like. What do you say, Miss Trelawney? I'm sure it will give me great pleasure to take you."

"I'm afraid I can't," replied Eleanor.

"But why? Have you another engagement?"

"Of course she has," said Emily Barnes, who thought she saw a chance of "paying that stuck-up Trelawney girl out" as she called it. "The Lyceum is too tame for her. She prefers going to the Frivolity with Mr. Wakeham, and to some place to supper afterwards. By the way, how is Mr. Wakeham, Eleanor?"

"Come, come, Emily, that's going a bit too far," interposed Barnes.

"Why is it going too far?" asked Emily, by this time madly jealous at the attention her lover was paying Eleanor. "She *does* go to the Frivolity with Mr. Wakeham, and a man I know told me he saw them at supper at the Azure Sky, one of those fast night clubs that was raided. Of course Mr. Wakeham is a married man, but that doesn't matter, does it? Come now, it's no use getting huffy about it; we know what we know."

A flush of shame surmounted the girl's face, and she did not know what to say. She felt as though her horrible experiences of the evening to which Emily referred must be known to all London, and she would have given anything to have got out of the room. Her previous experiences during the afternoon were painful enough, but she felt that this was more than she could bear.

"And what if a girl *does* go out for an evening's enjoyment," cried Pilling, who evidently admired Eleanor very much. "As far as I know there's no harm in the Friv or going for a bit of supper and a hop afterwards. Everybody does it, these days."

"Some people seem very lucky," sneered Emily. "It isn't every typist that can drink champagne with their suppers."

"No, it isn't," laughed Pilling. "I wish I could get it sometimes."

"Now, if we've all finished tea," broke in Mrs. Barnes, "you'd better get into the other room. Peggy and I will wash up the tea things. Now, Miss Trelawney, you must

not take any notice of Emily; she's a bit tart with her tongue, but she doesn't mean anything wrong. Go into the sitting-room and make yourself at home. There's a nice fire there."

"I'm afraid I can't stay any longer," replied Eleanor. "I must go."

"But not yet," objected Mrs. Barnes. "It's only just turned six."

"Thank you, I really must get back."

"Well, if you will, you will," assented Mrs. Barnes after a great many protestations had been made, "but I don't see any reason why. We expected you to spend the evening with us."

"I'll see you home, anyhow," said Barnes.

"No, no, please don't trouble," replied Eleanor. "I can quickly get to the station from here."

"Couldn't think of it," persisted Barnes. "What, see my own sister-in-law go home alone? No indeed, that wouldn't do."

"But I really prefer it," urged the girl. "I couldn't think of your leaving Peg."

"Oh, Peg's all right. I often leave her of an evening. You see she has Mother now. I'll put on my overcoat right away."

"But I really couldn't dream of it," said Eleanor with a note in her voice which even Barnes could not help noticing.

"Do you mean to say you'd rather not have me?" he said with heightened voice. "Very well, I'm not the one to push my company upon any one."

"Oh, please don't take it that way," said Eleanor, who was anxious for Peggy's sake not to have any unpleasantness, "but I really would prefer to be alone."

"Of course she would," laughed Emily. "No doubt she has her engagements, Jim, and although you have

"Well, if I can't have a bit of comfort here, I shall where I can." Soon after he left the house.

After that Peggy's life became a perfect misery.

Mrs. Barnes upbraided her with being utterly useless besides being a drag on the family.

"If you'd only be sensible," said Mrs. Barnes, "Jim would like you better, but how can he care about a girl who is always peevish, and never brings a penny to help? Oh, I tell you straight we are not going to stand it much longer. The girls are complaining, too, and say the place isn't like home any longer. If you want to keep Jim you'd better swallow your pride, and get your family to help you. What would a few pounds a week be to them? Nothing; and it would be a great deal to us."

As for Barnes, he seldom stayed in the house at night. When he came home from work he partook of his food in silence, and then went out alone, while Mrs. Barnes and her daughters would look at each other significantly.

"Do you know where Jim goes to?" asked Peggy on one occasion. "He won't tell me."

"Oh, he goes where he can have pleasant society," retorted Emily.

"It's no use saying I like it," said Mrs. Barnes woefully, "but Jim was always that way, and I've always said that he liked Agnes best of all the girls he kept company with. Of course she has a nice house, too, and nobody would be pleasanter or more entertaining than Jim when he's a mind to."

A little later Peggy realized that an air of mystery prevailed in the house. There was nothing definite upon which she could fasten, but from the sudden silence which fell upon Mrs. Barnes and her daughters whenever she entered the room, she could not help realizing hat they were discussing matters about which they did ot wish her to know.

"Have you seen your sister lately?" asked Mrs. Barnes of her, one day.

"I've only seen her once since she was here," replied Peggy.

"But you should, my dear," urged the woman with a show of friendliness. "We don't want to be a disturbing element between relations. Of course she thinks herself too good to come here again."

"And we think ourselves too good to have her," snapped Emily.

"Still I say you ought to go and see her sometimes," continued Mrs. Barnes.

At that moment Barnes came back to his dinner, and evidently something unpleasant had happened, for he was in a bad temper.

"I was just saying to Peggy that she ought to go and see her sister oftener. Why don't you spend a Saturday afternoon with her? Typists are always free of a Saturday afternoon."

"Would you mind if I went, Jim?" asked Peggy, and there was eagerness in her voice.

"I don't care where you go," was his reply. "You can throw yourself in the river, for all I care."

"Come, Jim, you don't mean that," said his mother coaxingly. "Don't mind him, Peggy, my dear. You go and have a chat with your sister; it will do you good."

It came about, therefore, that on the following Saturday afternoon, Peggy made her way to Eleanor's rooms.

"Look here, Peg," said Eleanor, "I'm not going to ask you any questions, but we're going to have a jolly time. I have been very economical lately, and I can afford to give you a treat. We will go to a matinée of *Chu Chin Chow* this afternoon, and then we'll go to a nice place for tea, and after that, we'll come home here and spend the evening together."

"That's awfully good of you. You're sure you can afford it?"

"Perfectly sure."

"It will be lovely!" cried Peggy, "but I must not get home later than nine o'clock."

"That can be easily managed. Come on."

For nearly three hours the girls forgot their troubles in the brilliant spectacle at His Majesty's Theatre, and afterwards, according to Eleanor's programme, they went to a cozy tea-room where they spent some time together.

"We've had a glorious time!" cried Peggy, when at length they reached Eleanor's room. "But, Eleanor, you don't seem happy."

"Don't bother about me, I'm all right; and don't let's think of anything unpleasant. Let's talk about old times when we were kiddies together."

For more than two hours they chatted together as girls will. Eleanor appeared to be gay, almost hilariously so, while Peggy, forgetting for a moment her associations with Primrose Terrace, seemed something like the Peggy of old times.

"Oh, if we could only live together, Eleanor! If we could only spend our evenings like this!"

"But we can't," replied the other. "I must say it, Peg, I simply could not stand that man. I know you have married him, but—but he's impossible. Won't you leave him, and come with me?"

"No," replied Peggy.

Even yet she felt she must be loyal to him. The evening before he had remained at home, and she thought he appeared kinder, and more thoughtful.

Just before nine o'clock, Peggy left St. Hildebrand's Mansions for Camden Town, and she shuddered as she made her way through the cold wintry night. It was not raining, but the air was dank and depressing. The

streets were muddy and miserable. As she neared the station her mind flashed, in spite of herself, to her old home. Her conversation with her sister had brought up a thousand memories of those days before the war, when as children, they laughed and romped in the great playroom. She thought of a party they had once had when her father had come into the room dressed as Santa Claus, and had given them all sorts of presents. What fun they had! What laughter! And she had given it all up for this! She was still only a child in years, and yet she felt that her childhood was passing from her, and that she had nothing to look forward to but a lifetime's association with the Barnes family.

How mad she had been! Not only mad but wicked! For she *had* been wicked. She felt it now. She remembered the look on her father's face as she saw him last, realized how old and how haggard he appeared. And yet he had been kind and loving through it all. Then she thought of her mother. Thought also of the way she had defied her, and threatened her; and why had she done it? How had it all ended?

Would Barnes be home when she arrived at Primrose Terrace? She did not expect him; she almost hoped he would not be. Oh, the horror of the place, the miserable, squalid, coarse, common horror of it all!

Yes, she had been a fool, and worse than a fool. She, too, had been common, and vulgar. She had been enamoured of people of whom she now felt ashamed. Fancy introducing Barnes to her father's friends! But more than that, she had been wicked. Yes, positively wicked. She had saddened the lives of both her father and her mother.

Again her mind flashed back to the old home of her childhood, and she remembered how her father used to put her to bed and listen to her while she said her prayers. She called to mind the words with which she

always finished her prayers. "God bless Daddie and Mummie, and Trev, and John, and Eleanor, and make me a good girl; and bless everybody and make them happy, for Christ's sake, Amen."

She had laughed at all this; *now* she was going back to Camden Town, to Primrose Terrace, and to the Barnes family!

She left the train at Camden Town and found her way through the dismal muddy streets to Primrose Terrace. When she arrived at number 13 she found the place in darkness. What did it mean? Mrs. Barnes never went out in the evening, although the girls always went to the pictures on a Saturday evening, and generally returned about half-past ten with their young men. She tried the door. It was locked, and silence reigned in the house. The houses on either side of number 13 were also in darkness.

What should she do! Perhaps Mrs. Barnes thought she would not be home until late, and had gone with her daughters to the movies. She remembered a picture palace in the main street not far away. She would go there and spend an hour. By that time Mrs. Barnes would have returned.

A little later she had partially forgotten her troubles in watching an impossible story being reproduced on the screen. Then, when it was over, she came out into the street again. A clock near by struck half-past ten. She hurried back to Primrose Terrace, and found that number 13 was still in darkness.

What could it mean? They knew she was out, and she had told them she should return about nine o'clock. She seized the rusty knocker and rapped at the door. There was no response. She knocked louder. Still no answer. She began to be frightened. Something had happened, and with a kind of frenzy she knocked still louder. Then

she heard a movement in the adjoining house, and the door opened.

"Who's that?"

"It's I, Mrs. Simpkins, Mrs. Jim Barnes."

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, Mrs. Barnes asked me to tell you when you came back that she and her girls 'ad gone away for a bit of an 'oliday."

"But where?"

"I don't know nothing about that. She said they might be away several days. I expect this letter will tell you all you want to know. She asked me to give it to you if you should come. Good-night. Dark, ain't it?" and the woman sniggered meaningly.

Peggy took the letter like one in a dream. She was too bewildered to readily comprehend the meaning of it all. She walked to the nearest lamp-post and opened the letter. It was in Barnes' handwriting, but there was no address or signature.

"I have had enough of it," she read, "and so, I expect, have you. If you want your liberty you can easily get it. I am going my way, and you can go yours."

CHAPTER XXIX

PEGGY'S BETRAYAL

BEWILDERED as she was, Peggy had to read this letter more than once before the full meaning of it burst upon her. Presently, however, she understood. Barnes was tired of her, and had thrown her off like an old glove, his family conniving at the action he had taken. She saw now why they were so anxious for her to go to see her sister, and understood why they told her not to come back until nine o'clock. They had made this an opportunity whereby they could be rid of her, not caring what became of her.

Oh, the horror, the degradation of it!

For some time she did not know what she was doing, or where she was going. She only knew that she was adrift in London, that she, the daughter of General Trelawney, was alone and unprotected in the London streets, a castaway.

What could she do? Where could she go? A sense of utter desolation and misery possessed her, and she was ashamed beyond words. At that moment she scarcely cared what happened to her. She was not yet nineteen years of age, and what had the future for her?

Up to now she had, in spite of everything, refused to be anything but loyal to Barnes. She had excused his words of cruelty. She had fought against the loathing which sometimes filled her when she realized that she was wedded to him for life. In her way, and in spite of all her faults, she had tried to think kindly of him, and to be loving to him. For his sake she had refused to

share Eleanor's offered hospitality. Ay, and more than that, for his sake she had refused to go to her own home. For his sake, too, she had borne with his sisters' sneers and jibes, and his mother's constant insults. And now it had come to this.

What could she do?

Again the question haunted her. She remembered what Barnes had said only two nights before when she had suggested spending the afternoon with her sister. "You can throw yourself in the river," he had snarled. "I don't care what you do."

Well, why not? Life had nothing to offer her.

She would not go to Eleanor and tell her what had taken place. She simply could not. She could see the look that would come into her sister's eyes, the bitter smile that would curl on her lips.

For a long time she walked, unheeding whither she went. Then presently she realized that she had passed from the streets and had entered an open space. The wind had risen, and dark clouds were being swept across the sky. Above her head, she saw patches of blue, and here and there a star shining.

Why, this was Hampstead Heath! She was near home; not more than five minutes' walk from her father's house! Almost instinctively she thought of the morning when her father and mother had come to her, and she remembered the former's words: "Good-morning, my dear; you'll remember that your father's and mother's house is always open to *you*."

She had felt at the time that his unconscious emphasis on the last word was an insult to the man to whom she had sworn to be loyal, but now it came to her like healing balm. They still loved her. In spite of everything she was her Dad's little Peggy still.

Great sobs rose to her throat, sobs which almost choked her.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she wailed. "Oh, God, help me! Oh, if they only would, if they only would! But I dare not! I'm ashamed!"

Her old home seemed like heaven to her now, and the restrictions which at one time seemed so irksome were something to rejoice in. Oh, to have a home, and tenderness, and love! To be with her own people! To breathe the atmosphere of affection and refinement! Oh, God help her!—if she only could!

What would John say? What would Trev's *fiancée* say? Did her father really mean it when he told her she might come home? He was a proud man, and would shudder at anything like disgrace coming to his name; and she had disgraced it by becoming the wife of such a creature as Barnes. And yet——

Then there came to her memory, like some long-forgotten dream, the words she had read in childhood, and forgotten in her girlhood. A saying from the most beautiful story ever told. "I will arise and go to my father and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned. . . ."

But could she? All the time she had been walking, walking, she knew not whither. Then suddenly she saw a light. Yes, it was home! That was her father's house! That was a light coming from one of the windows.

She crept wearily along no longer. Her feet seemed to be winged, and she rushed pantingly to the door of her old home.

She knocked timidly, like one afraid. Then as there was no answer, more loudly.

She heard footsteps in the hall, firm, decided footsteps, and the door opened.

"Yes, what is it?"

It was her father's voice.

"It's me, Dad. . . . Peggy. . . . Will you let me come in?"

"Peggy?"

"Yes, Dad. I've—I've come home. I have no home but this. Will you have me?"

In a second the General understood. He required no mental process to comprehend everything. His heart leapt to the truth.

"My little Peggy!" he cried. "Come in, my darling! Come in; you must be cold. Come in!—There, let me see your face. Kiss your old Dad, my little girl! I am glad you have come!"

He drew her to the warm, well-lighted room as he spoke, and held her close to his heart, while the girl sobbed convulsively.

"I didn't know—I was—so near! Then I saw the light! I—I didn't know what I was doing! But—but I couldn't help it! I have come home, Dad!—I'm so miserable and—ashamed!"

Her words came incoherently between great heart-breaking sobs. She scarcely knew what she was saying, but the long pent-up feelings which had been buried in her heart for months, were trying to find expression.

Meanwhile, her father held her to his heart. His brain even yet had failed to grasp the situation, but his love made him understand everything.

"There, there, Peggy, it's all right! It's your old home, my dear! No matter what's happened. Everything is right," and his voice was hoarse because his heart was a wild tumult.

"I'm—I'm so ashamed," stammered Peggy, "but—but I couldn't help coming. Something drew me here in spite of myself. When I found out what I was,—what it all meant, I think I went mad. I didn't know where I was going. I thought I would go to the river and throw myself into the water. . . . There seemed nothing else for me. Then I saw I was on the Heath, and—and I didn't know where I was going, although I kept on walking. Then I saw the light. . . . Will

—will you have me, Dad? I know I've been a bad girl, but I couldn't help coming home; something made me."

"Have you! Of course I'll have you! There, my darling, don't fear anything, your old Dad is here; he will keep you safe. There, sit before the fire, and let me pull off your wet cold boots; then I'll go to your mother and tell her you have come home."

He drew her to an armchair as he spoke, and took off her hat and jacket.

"Are you better now, my little Peg?" he went on, scarcely realizing what he was saying or doing. "You're cold and hungry, aren't you? There, there now, don't cry. It's all right. I'll go and fetch Mother."

"No, no! not yet!" sobbed the girl.

"What shall I do for you then? I'm so glad to see you, Peg. Is there anything you want? I'll get Mother here in a minute. She'll know better than I what to do."

"No, no! not yet," persisted Peggy. "Please, Dad," she sobbed, "let me sit on your knee like I used to. I haven't sat on your knee—since—before the war, and—and . . ."

"Yes, my darling," said the General, whose eyes were brimming with tears, "that's it! There now, sit on my knee, and put your arms round my neck, as you used to years ago, and tell me everything."

She laid her head on his shoulder like a tired, broken-hearted child, and then she sobbed out her story. . . . Such a pitiful story! So common, yet so tragic. She told it between heart-broken sobs, and exclamations of shame, and sorrow.

"And is that all?" asked the General at length.

"That's all, except that I want to be with you, and—and I want—oh, I want Mother!"

"Of course you do! It's all right. Your old Dad is gladder than words can tell to have you back. Yes, I understand what you feel. It's all a miserable business;

—but never mind, you have come home now. There, there, kiss me again, my dear."

"But—but do you *really* forgive me? Do you really *mean* to say that you'll have me here, just as if I hadn't been so wicked? For, oh, I have been so miserable!—so ashamed!—and—and I *do* want to be good, and I *do* want Mother."

"Of *course* you do!" The General half laughed, and half sobbed out the words. "Don't be afraid, Peggy, we'll make everything right. The old miserable past is over, and in some way we'll begin anew. There, there, I'll go and fetch Mother."

He rushed away as he spoke, while the child looked around the room she had known all her life. There were the old books, the old pictures, the old furniture. Everything she saw seemed to bid her welcome, everything seemed to tell her of an undying love. This was home—the home which in her madness, and in her wickedness, she had left, but which was now the haven of refuge for which she so longed.

She heard murmuring voices and hasty footsteps, and then she knew she was in her mother's arms. She heard her mother's voice, felt the warm kisses on her cheek. She wanted to explain, wanted to—she knew not what.

"Oh, Mother, he's left me! and—and it's wrong, I know,—but I'm glad he has! I could not go to him again even if he wanted me. It's all been so awful, so horrible!"

"Of course it has," cried Mrs. Trelawney.

She seemed to know what to do better than her husband. There was that touch of intimacy, knowledge, and innate wisdom which helps to make the crooked places straight, and the rough places plain.

"Of course you mustn't cry; what is there to cry about? You have come home, my darling. And, Lester, can't you see that the poor child is tired and faint? The

servants have gone to bed, but that doesn't matter. Oh, yes, it's no use telling me, Peggy, I know you're hungry. I'll go and get something for you."

There was healing in every word, in every tone, in every movement. The child's bitter, wounded, bleeding heart felt it, and understood. There were no reproachful questions, no upbraidings, no saying, "I told you so." The time for these things might come later, but now it was heartfelt gladness: a welcome home which her poor little soul longed for.

"No, no, I'm not going to let you talk to me about all those miserable things!" cried the mother, as Peggy again tried to return to her sordid tale of the past few months. "There's no need for that now, and you must not trouble a bit about the future. We shall be able to talk about that some other time. All that matters now is that you are here, my darling."

"I was afraid that—you would be away," sobbed Peggy. "It seemed strange that you should be up so late."

"I could not go to bed," said the General. "I don't know why, but I felt as though I must sit up."

The door opened again, and John entered.

"Hello, Peg, old girl!" said the boy rather awkwardly. "Good business! I thought I heard your voice, so I put on these clothes over my pajamas and came down."

"Yes, Peg's come home," cried the General. "Come to stay. Isn't it splendid?"

"He left me this," said Peggy piteously, handing John the letter which Barnes had written. "I've been staying with his mother, and—and, Jack, don't look like that!" For John had read the letter by this time, and knew the whole truth as if by intuition.

"The mean, dirty swine! But it's all right, Peg, he'll [illegible]r trouble you any more," said the boy, speaking

awkwardly, but with a look shining from his eyes which made Peggy understand in spite of everything.

"Of course it's going to be all right," said Mrs. Trelawney. "Are you quite warm now, darling? Will you have something more to eat?"

"No, no, Mother. Don't mind my crying, but it's all so beautiful—I never knew before how beautiful it was. Dad, you're sure it's you, aren't you? You're sure I'm home, really? Will you let me get on your knee again? And, Dad, you're sure you forgive me, aren't you? I have been wicked; but—but I *do* want to be a good girl!"

The General took her on his knee again. "There, there, my little Peggy, snuggle up close to me just as you did in the old days when I used to tell you stories, before I put you to bed. Is that all right?"

"It's just beautiful, Dad," she sobbed, "just beautiful!"

Unmindful of the time, they sat together, talking. Little by little Peggy became calmer, and in spite of their protests she insisted on telling her story again; such a mean, miserable story! She seemed to want to unburden her heart, to throw from her life the experiences of the last few months. It might be as though she were a little child again, a little kiddie who had been naughty, and now entered the happiness which comes through forgiveness.

But it was more than that, and although they said nothing of it, each knew it. Especially did the General feel that, although his little Peggy had come home, contrite and repentant, that he, with all his love, could never wipe out the past. He saw by her shudders, and by her expression of loathing when Barnes' name was mentioned, the misery and the truth. He could not undo the fact that in many senses his child's life was ruined, and that in the days to come she would feel the pollution of

her association with the man with whom she had been madly infatuated.

But he would not upbraid her. He would try, as far as in him lay, to destroy the effect of those miserable months. He knew she had destroyed much of her girlhood. She had made her future black with a kind of shame which she could not express, and she would be forever haunted by the thought that her life had been contaminated with evil. She had come back, but it could never be as though she had never gone away. There were still the months which the locusts had eaten.

But he kept all that from Peggy. In spite of everything his heart went out to her with a great overwhelming love, and the thought of her contrition and her penitence went far to atone for the pain she had caused him.

"We must get Trev home!" he cried. "I'm sure it can be managed—and we must get Mary Penryn up here, too. You'll like her, Peg."

"Yes, she's a ripping girl," was John's emphasis. "You must get her up here to-morrow, Dad. I'll bring her up to lunch if you like. I'll run down with the car for her to-morrow morning."

"And now we won't talk any longer," said Mrs. Trelawney. "I can see you're tired."

"I feel as though I shall never be tired again," sobbed Peggy.

"Ah, but you are. I insist on you going to bed now."

A few minutes later Peggy was in her own bedroom, the bedroom she had known from childhood. Oh, how beautiful, how restful everything was! She recognized every article in the room. Nothing seemed to have been changed since she left it. It had been furnished according to her own desires and tastes. The colourings were perfect, everything accorded with everything else, and it was all so sweet and restful. An air of refinement pre-

vailed, too. Everything was so different from the vulgar squalor of Primrose Terrace.

"Is everything all right, Peggy?" asked her mother.

"Kneel with me as I say my prayers," she sobbed. "Just as you used to do in the old days, Mother. I've been a wicked girl, but I will be good. Oh, I will be good!"

Side by side they knelt, while the mother, scarcely less moved than her child, put her arm round her. "Please, God, forgive me, and help me to be a good girl."

It was the old prayer of her childhood which came back to her, and for the moment she felt like a child again. And after all, she was but little more. But her childhood had gone, and she knew it, and although she could not put it into words, she felt the tragedy of it.

"There now, go to sleep," said her mother, as Peggy nestled among the clean white sheets. "We shall be here in the morning."

"May I come in, Peggy?"

"Yes, Dad; please come."

The General knelt beside the bed and kissed her. "God bless you, my little girl," he said, and his voice broke. "Good-night, we'll meet in the morning."

CHAPTER XXX

AT SPURLING AND KING'S

ELEANOR TRELAWNEY had said but little to her sister about her own experiences. She had told her nothing of the episode which had so frightened her. Neither had she mentioned Rod Ravenscroft in any way.

On the morning following Ravenscroft's visit she had received a letter from Ellen Chellew telling her that she did not intend to return to the flat again, and asking her to forward her things to a given address. As Eleanor read the letter she felt the tragedy of it, and instead of doing what she had been asked she wrote a long letter to Ellen beseeching her to come back. Her eyes were being opened.

But her letter was sent in vain. Two days later she received another epistle from Ellen to the effect that she had counted the cost of her action, and that she did not intend to be tied down to Puritanical notions.

As for Eleanor herself, her mind was in a condition difficult to describe. Her experiences on the night when Ravenscroft had rescued her from a position which she shrank from thinking about, had somehow revolutionized her whole being. She could not understand the infatuation which women of the Tamsin Cory class had had over her. The sudden revelation of her feelings in regard to Rod Ravenscroft had changed everything.

Never had Eleanor realized the helplessness of her future as she realized it now. For years she had rather gloried in the idea that men had no attraction for her. She had been pleased when she had been referred to as sexless. The whole idea of giving her life to any man

was utterly out of accord with her philosophy of life. For that reason she had been largely oblivious to Ravenscroft's real feelings towards her, and if she had known, she would not have cared.

Of course she was very young, and had been well-nigh carried off her feet by Tamsin Cory, and was under the spell of women who proclaimed the new era of moral and intellectual liberty which had hitherto been denied to her sex.

Then followed the events which are outlined in this narrative. With all a foolish girl's confidence in her own powers, she had seen no danger in her associations with Wakeham. Other women had their men friends, why not she? It was true she did not like Wakeham. He struck her as a coarse, somewhat unpleasant specimen of the man-about-town, but she reflected that he might be helpful to her, especially in view of Peggy's difficulties. But she was not afraid. Her own feelings were entirely platonic, and she laughed at the idea that she, Eleanor Trelawney, who had always been spoken of as cold as an icicle, would be unable to take care of herself.

Up to that time she was as determined as ever not to submit to the restrictions of home life, neither did she repent of the step she had taken. Of course, she missed many of the refinements and comforts of her father's house at Hampstead, but in their place she had her liberty and she was able to live her own life.

Then came that awful moment when Rod Ravenscroft had rescued her from the ghastly position in which she had found herself. She realized the horror she had of such men as Wakeham; realized, too, how they regarded women.

Of course, one thing had been made plain to her: she was no longer able to go to Speke and Burnham's. She imagined that in any case Wakeham would make it impossible; but even if he desired her to retain her old

position she could not do so. She therefore wrote to the firm resigning her position.

But what to do she did not know. She had but very little money, and how to live was a question which stared her in the face.

On the Monday she diligently searched the advertisements in the newspapers for something that might suit her. Many of these advertisements she answered, sometimes in writing, sometimes in person, but nothing came of them. Positions no longer went begging, and there seemed to be half a dozen applicants for every one that was open.

At the end of a week she was well-nigh in despair. That she must leave St. Hildebrand's Mansions was evident. Shabby and uncomfortable as her rooms were, she could not pay for them. Indeed, as she looked at the rapidly diminishing contents of her purse, a great terror possessed her.

Then, suddenly, great good fortune came to her. She received a letter from a well-known firm in the city, signed by one of the partners, which seemed to her like a message from heaven.

She could not understand it. What could such a firm as Spurling and King know of her? She was not aware that these people were cognizant of her existence; yet the letter before her was plain enough.

"DEAR MADAM, (it ran)

"We are given to understand that you have left Messrs. Speke and Burnham, where you acted as secretary to Mr. Wakeham, of that firm. As I am in need of a secretary, and as I judge, from what I have heard of your capabilities, you would be able to do the work I require, I shall be glad (if you are open to consider the situation which I offer) if you will call at the above address to-morrow morning at half-past ten.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALFRED SPURLING."

The news seemed to be too good to be true. Surely it must be a hoax. But no, it could not be. It was written on the firm's note-paper, and bore every sign of genuineness. Spurling and King was an old-established firm of merchants. It was on the highest pedestal of respectability, and was known for its soundness and its old-fashioned ways. She had heard it spoken of as a firm which had fought long against modern innovations, and had for years refused to adopt either the telephone or the typewriter.

Of course she would go. There was an old-world courtesy manifest in the letter which cheered her in spite of herself.

When she arrived at the offices of Spurling and King she was impressed by the atmosphere of the place. Everything was quiet and orderly. The furniture of the offices was somewhat old, but it suggested security and respectability. There was none of the rush and hurry which she had seen at Speke and Burnham's. Most of the clerks were middle-aged men; some, indeed, were quite old, and looked as though they had been there all their lives.

"Will you come this way?" said the man who looked at the paper on which her name and business were written. "Mr. Spurling is expecting you."

A minute later she was ushered into a spacious office which seemed so quiet and restful that it might have been far away from the great rushing life of the metropolis.

The furniture of the room was rich and costly. Thickly piled carpets covered the floor; great, heavy mahogany desks and cases were placed around the room. Everything spoke of prosperity and order.

Seated at a desk not far from a glowing fire sat a portly, white-haired old gentleman who looked at her steadily for a few seconds through his gold-rimmed spectacles. He *might* have been from sixty-five to seventy

years of age, and had a benign, placid appearance which reminded Eleanor of the prosperous, old-time merchant of a hundred years ago. There was no suggestion of the "get-rich-quick" kind of man in this old gentleman. He was not the sort who would touch risky speculations, neither would he connive at shady transactions. Possibly his father and grandfather drove to the city, in the old days before trains and telegraphs, behind a spanking pair of horses, from some comfortable country mansion situated a few miles from London.

"Miss Eleanor Trelawney?" he queried as he looked at the paper which the man had left with him.

The girl nervously assented.

"Good old-fashioned names, both of them," remarked the old gentleman with a smile. "Any relation of the Trelawney family of Cornwall?"

"I believe we are distantly connected," replied the girl, "but we don't know them."

"No, but it's a good old-fashioned name, anyhow. But *you* are not old-fashioned, I take it, Miss Trelawney?"

"I don't quite understand you, sir," ventured Eleanor.

"I dare say you don't. What I meant was, that you have broken away from the old traditions concerning a woman's place and work. I hear you are an excellent stenographer and typist, that you understand bookkeeping, and have quite an intimate knowledge of affairs generally. I hear, too, that you know a good deal about shipping."

"A little," replied Eleanor.

"Let me see how much," and forthwith he put to the girl a number of questions, technical as well as general, about the great shipping industries of the world. While he did so he was no longer the placid, benign old gentleman, but the keen man of affairs, who had his finger on the pulse of the world's commerce.

"Yes," he said with a smile when that part of his catechism was over, "for a young lady you know a great deal. Where, and how did you learn it?"

Eleanor told him.

"I see," he went on, "but even with the facilities you have had, it requires a good deal of intelligence to learn so much in such a short time. But about your stenography and typing, I want to know something of that. I may tell you that I am very particular about my letters, and about the way drafts of contracts are drawn up. I make a strong point of punctuation and paragraphing. Sometimes, too, I dictate very rapidly, and I require such intelligence and education on the part of my secretary as will enable her to interpret my meaning as well as the exact words I utter. In short, I hate the idea of an automaton and desire an intelligent secretary. Do you mind if I put you to the test?"

A minute later Eleanor was seated at a table writing rapidly, while the old gentleman walked to and fro dictating a technical document.

"There," he said at the end of ten minutes, "if you'll get that transcribed I shall see whether you can help me in the way I desire."

Eleanor seated herself before the typewriter and commenced her work. At first she was so excited and nervous that she made many mistakes, but before she reached the end of the page she was in full possession of her faculties again. She, therefore, threw the page away and commenced a new one. At the end of half an hour she had the document all ready.

The old gentleman read it carefully, word by word, noting each paragraph, each colon, each semicolon, each full stop.

"Yes," he said at length, "this will do very well. You work carefully and rapidly. There are no scratchings out, no smudges. There is not only education here, but

intelligence. As far as I can see, I shall not have to make a single alteration."

He stood for a few minutes as if thinking deeply.

"Do you like this kind of work, Miss Trelawney?"

"No," replied the girl.

"Then why do you do it?"

"Forgive me, I did not speak quite accurately," replied Eleanor. "I do like it in a way. The drudgery of typewriting is not pleasant, but there is real interest in the human side of business. It appeals to the imagination, it widens one's outlook. Besides—one must do what one can."

"Yes, yes, I see."

It might have been that questions of a personal nature were hanging upon his lips, but he did not ask them; perhaps his conception of the courtesy due to a lady prevented him.

"I think you may regard yourself as engaged, Miss Trelawney," he said presently.

"Thank you, I will do my best."

"Yes," said the old gentleman, after a pause, "you are on the point of asking me something. What is it?"

"I was wondering if you did not require references," said Eleanor with a painful blush. Something, she knew not what, dragged the words from her.

"References? Ah, yes, of course. But you are a daughter of General Lester Trelawney, are you not?"

"Yes."

"He bears a great name, a good name; with regard to your business abilities I have satisfied myself; and, of course, the daughter of General Trelawney should not need to be recommended. Still—perhaps you would not mind my writing to your father?"

"I would rather you did not," replied Eleanor.

"Ah, why?"

"I would rather you did not," she repeated.

"I'm sorry for that."

"I want to be absolutely frank with you, Mr. Spurling," said Eleanor. "I have left my father's house."

"Dear, dear, wasn't he kind to you? No, no, I recall that question. I had no right to ask it."

"I think you had," replied the girl; "all the same, I'd rather not answer it."

She felt ashamed of herself. Why, she did not know, except that there was something in this courtly, old-fashioned gentleman's demeanour which made her feel that she had done something unworthy. In a way he reminded her of her father, although he was altogether different from him. There was no suggestion of military precision such as she had associated with her father. Instead of being tall, spare, upright, the very embodiment of a British soldier, Mr. Spurling was portly, and somewhat homely in his appearance, and yet she saw the stamp of the same kind of man.

"Of course you'll be willing for me to refer to Speke and Burnham?" queried Mr. Spurling.

"Yes," she replied, "but I saw little either of Mr. Speke or Mr. Burnham. I was secretary to Mr. Wakeham," and again she flushed painfully.

"And you left there on your own accord?"

"Yes."

"May I ask why?"

Eleanor's lips became tremulous, and she spoke with difficulty.

"Because Mr. Wakeham was not a gentleman," she replied.

Mr. Spurling was silent for a few seconds, then he said with a smile:

"Perhaps both Mr. Speke and Mr. Burnham know more about you than you think. However, I feel quite confident in engaging you, if you care to come to me.

Yes, there is another question you want to ask me. What is it?"

Again Eleanor felt afraid. This old gentleman, pleasant and benign as he appeared to be, seemed to possess a kind of intuition, a power of reading her unexpressed thoughts.

"You were wondering how I came to hear of you," he went on, "but, my dear young lady, you need not trouble about that. People in my position have all sorts of means of finding out things. Besides, I happen to know the firm you were with before you went to Speke and Burnham's. There is nothing else, is there? Oh, yes, I forgot; there's the question of salary. If it is not rude on my part, how much did they give you?"

Eleanor told him.

"I will continue that," replied Mr. Spurling, "if it's quite agreeable to you."

"Thank you," replied the girl.

"And, by the way, Miss Trelawney, I have a young lady in the office who has been with me some time. Poor girl, she is very unfortunate; she has just lost her father, and is for the moment without a home. I wonder if you know of lodgings which are within her means? Honeywood is her name—quite a nice girl."

"If—if she would share my rooms!" cried Eleanor eagerly.

A few minutes later she had explained to Mr. Spurling how she was situated.

"Ah, I should think that would suit Miss Honeywood very well. But, of course, you must see her before anything is settled. Living together is a very serious matter, and you and she might not like each other. I think you will, though. Then there is another matter. I must introduce you to Miss Statham. Miss Statham is my partner's secretary; indeed she is something more than a secretary, and has very intimate relationships with the

firm. It is well that you should know her. She is a very capable woman, very capable indeed. She has been with us something like ten years. Will you come this way?"

He led the way to an adjoining office as he spoke—an office which was almost a replica of the one she had just left. The same air of comfort prevailed, the same quietness, the same order, and the same atmosphere of established prosperity.

Seated at a desk similar to that of Mr. Spurling sat a gentleman who might have been five years his junior. He was faultlessly attired, and although not portly like Mr. Spurling, suggested the same quiet contentment. Near to him sat a woman of about thirty-five years of age with whom he had evidently been conversing on an important matter.

"This is Miss Trelawney, Mr. King, the young lady I told you about. She has been with me for the last hour, and I think we have satisfied each other that we shall be able to work together."

"I am delighted, Miss Trelawney," said Mr. King, rising from his chair and holding out his hand. "You'll find Mr. Spurling a hard taskmaster, but I will say this of him: he is very just, extremely so, in fact. This is Miss Statham," and he nodded to the lady who sat near him. "She has been with us a good many years now, and knows our business intimately."

"Yes, Miss Trelawney," added Mr. Spurling, "as I told you, it will be well for you to know Miss Statham. She will be able to initiate you into the intricacies of our business better than any one, and we trust her absolutely, absolutely. We have reason to."

Eleanor gave a quick glance towards the woman in question. She was about thirty-five years of age, but she looked younger, and in a way handsome. Ten years before, she might have been beautiful, but now there

were lines upon her face, an expression of weariness in her demeanour, and a look in her eyes difficult to define. That she was capable no one could doubt. Proficiency, thoroughness, clear-sightedness and a keen appreciation of her duties were manifest in her every look and movement; and yet, in a way which Eleanor could not understand, there was something in her presence which repelled her. Perhaps it was because her mouth was somewhat drawn down at the corners, and suggested discontent; or perhaps it might have been because of something restless and yearning in her eyes. This did not come to Eleanor as a distinct thought, but as a kind of vague impression which she could neither understand nor put into words. And yet she was strangely drawn to her. That the woman was a lady it was impossible to doubt. It might be, too, that she moved in good society, and certainly if her looks did not utterly belie her, she possessed an intelligence of a very high order.

"Have you two finished?" asked Mr. Spurling, after a general conversation about the work of the firm.

"We were just finishing as you came in," replied Mr. King. "Miss Statham is of opinion that we should take no part in that Indian business, and I quite agree with her."

"Ah, you have come to that conclusion too, have you?" replied Mr. Spurling. "Well, I am very glad of it; but there are two or three matters I want to speak to you about alone, King, so you may as well come into my room. Meanwhile, I think it will be well for Miss Statham and Miss Trelawney to spend an hour or two together."

"I was just going to suggest the same thing," replied Mr. King. "Miss Trelawney will naturally feel somewhat strange, and I am sure Miss Statham will soon familiarize her with what she has to do. Then there is the question of Miss Honeywood. Have you spoken to Miss Trelawney?"

"I have," replied Mr. Spurling. "Miss Trelawney occupies a little flat quite convenient to her work here, and the young lady who has been living with her has lately left her, so it will be to their mutual advantage to join forces, assuming, of course, that there is a mutual liking—I think there will be, too. Miss Honeywood is not brilliant, but she is an exceedingly nice girl."

"It's now twelve o'clock," said Miss Statham, when the partners had left them together. "We will have an hour's chat, and then go out to lunch together. What do you say?"

"I shall be delighted," replied Eleanor, who, in spite of Miss Statham's somewhat rigid manner, began to be drawn towards her.

For an hour she explained to Eleanor the broad outlines of the business of the firm, and the particular duties she would have to perform, and as one question led to another, Eleanor became impressed by the prodigious amount of knowledge which the other had amassed. As the conversation proceeded, too, the older woman became almost enthusiastic. The firm did business in almost every part of the world, and its transactions were large and important. Eleanor quickly found that Miss Statham's knowledge was not only extensive, but intimate. She was able to explain the locality of shipping centres of which Eleanor knew nothing but the name. She knew the financial resources of nearly every country in the world, and what those resources comprised. She spoke with assurance of the political outlook as well as of the constitution of various leading countries, and she seemed to have an intimate knowledge of the markets of the world.

"Oh, you are wonderful!" the girl could not help exclaiming after an hour's conversation. "You seem to know everything."

"Do I?" replied Miss Statham with a smile which was a little pathetic. "I had to, you know. The firm, as

gle with him, saw herself fighting his would-be caresses, leaping out of the taxicab, and rushing madly through the streets of London at midnight. Oh, the horror of it! She remembered the words those drunken men had said to her. They had taken her to be a lost woman of the streets, and had spoken to her as such, and then, while she had fought against them, Rod Ravenscroft had come to her help.

What must he have thought of her? Whatever he had felt towards her in the past he could only think of her now with a kind of shame. And she—she had brought it on herself.

Still Eleanor Trelawney was a proud girl, and she determined to fight her way. She was interested in her work, too. Her keen intelligence appreciated the far-reaching transactions of Spurling and King, and she saw that although she had been lately employed, she was becoming more and more trusted.

The more she saw of Miss Statham the more she respected her. She could not help doing so. Her almost masculine intelligence, and her grasp of the broad issues of commerce compelled her admiration. Socially, however, she drew no nearer to her. Miss Statham gave her no confidences and asked for none. She met her in a friendly way, talked to her about their work, but beyond this, their acquaintance did not go. Eleanor knew nothing of how or where she lived, who her acquaintances were, or what her history was. That she received a good income there could be no doubt. She dressed well, and from what Eleanor could judge, moved in good society. She could not help seeing, too, that she was deeply in the confidence of both her employers, while her opinions were greatly respected and generally acted upon by them. Compared with hers, Eleanor's was a subordinate position. Indeed, she often had to take orders from Miss Statham, as did others who occupied responsible positions in the firm.

Thus days lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months. Of her home she knew nothing. She had intimated to her father and mother that she did not wish any communication with them, while she had written to her brother John practically forbidding him to come to see her; and all the time she was filled with a great heart-hunger. It was now ten months since she had left home. The time was not long, as time goes, and yet it seemed to her as though ages had passed since her Hampstead days. She had made her choice in life, but what did it mean? What had the future to offer her?

One day (it was just after she had paid her Sunday afternoon visit to Primrose Terrace), Miss Statham came into the room where she was working.

"How do you spend your evenings, Miss Trelawney?" she asked.

"Generally in my rooms," replied Eleanor. "Occasionally I go to a woman's club of which I am a member, and now and then I take Miss Honeywood to a theatre; and—and that's about all, I think."

"I wish you'd come and have some dinner with me on Friday night, will you?"

"I shall be awfully glad, if I may," replied Eleanor. "Aren't you well, Miss Statham?"

"Oh, yes, I'm very well, I suppose, but—but never mind about me! You will come on Friday night, then?"

"Yes, but where?"

"I was forgetting. I live close by Regent's Park, about seven minutes' walk from Oxford Circus Subway Station. You'd rather come there than go to a restaurant, wouldn't you? Besides, we can be alone and have a quiet chat. Here is my address," and she handed Eleanor a visiting card.

On the Friday evening she found her way to the address Miss Statham had given her, and although she could not explain why, she felt that something important was going to happen.

CHAPTER XXXI

"MISS STATHAM"

ELEANOR saw at a glance that Miss Statham's rooms had an appearance of comfort, almost amounting to luxury. The house, which was large and handsome, overlooked Regent's Park, and was pleasantly situated. Years before, the whole row in which the house was placed had been occupied by people of position and affluence. As the years went by, however, and the craze for flats had grown, this, with other dwellings of a similar nature, had been turned into self-contained suites, and let, much to the proprietor's profit.

"Yes, the position is very pleasant," assented Miss Statham when Eleanor expressed delight at what she saw. "It's very convenient, too. One is in easy access to everything from here, and yet away from the noise and crowds. But come, take off your things, and sit by the fire. We are nearing the end of March, but the weather is bitterly cold."

She led the way into her bedroom as she spoke, and Eleanor saw taste and comfort everywhere.

"I am glad you like my rooms," said Miss Statham as she noted Eleanor's look of approbation. "You see, I have a bath-room adjoining, and also another bedroom in case I want to entertain a friend. From my point of view, I do not suppose I could get anything better. I can be in the office in twenty minutes, and the people here are very good to me. They have a very good cook and the service is, on the whole, excellent. Sometimes, of course, I dine at a restaurant for a change, but generally I have my dinner served here alone. I see you are looking at

my books," she went on, as they entered the front room again. "Yes, I read a good deal. I am not often in the humour for going out, and I'm afraid I am very extravagant in books. Of course the libraries do one pretty well, but I buy a good many all the same. Somehow I can never enjoy a borrowed book like I can one of my own."

A little later they sat down to dinner, which was deftly served by a quick-footed, silent servant. Everything was cooked to perfection, and showed that Miss Statham could command all that money could give her. It was evident, too, that she was a woman of taste. Every piece of furniture was a work of art. Indeed, every article in the room suggested a person of culture and affluence.

"And now," said Miss Statham, when they had finished dinner, "draw up your chair to the fire and let us talk. Will you forgive my saying so? I took a liking to you the first time we met, and I have for a long time wanted to ask you to come here, but I kept putting it off. As I get older I am afraid to act on impulse. I want to think out everything again and again before acting."

"I expect that is because of the responsible position you hold in the firm," replied Eleanor.

"Perhaps so: but I'm inclined to think I am getting crusted. Do you know how old I am?"

"A little over thirty, I should say."

"I am nearly thirty-seven," and there was a touch of bitterness in her voice. "Miss Trelawney, I want to tell you that you are winning golden opinions from both Mr. Spurling and Mr. King. I am saying this to spite myself, for I honestly believe I am a little bit jealous of you."

Eleanor laughed incredulously.

"It's true," replied Miss Statham. "Women are like *that, at least* women under certain conditions are, and

they get jealous in spite of themselves. Do you mind my speaking freely to you?"

"I shall be delighted if you will."

"Well, I think old maids are nearly all in a state of arrested development. If a woman does not marry by the time she's thirty-five, her nature, instead of mellowing, kind of shrivels up. That's why old maids are sour, and vinegary. Would you mind telling me what are your hopes and prospects?"

"That's rather a difficult question. My prospects?—you know them better than I. If I please my employers, and business continues good, perhaps I may advance a little more in their confidence; but my hopes?—the hopes of a girl are ofttimes very silly, aren't they?"

"Are they? I'm not sure. I don't want to depress you, Miss Trelawney, but you asked me the other day whether I was ill. No, I am not . . . but . . . I think I am rather miserable."

"I am sorry," replied Eleanor politely.

"Some people have a genius for friendship," went on Miss Statham. "I have not. I had years ago, I think; but that part of my nature has become atrophied. But I have taken a liking to you. I feel that I can speak to you; perhaps there's something akin in our natures. I want to speak confidentially to you about myself. It's an awful confession to make, isn't it? but I do. Is it because I'm getting old, or is it a woman's whim? I am thirty-seven, and you are just over twenty, I suppose?"

"Nearly twenty-two," replied Eleanor.

"Then there are fifteen years between us. Do you ever expect to get married?"

"No," replied Eleanor.

"But you will; at least, I hope you will."

"Why should I?"

Miss Statham was silent for a few seconds. "Miss Trelawney," she said at length, "I suppose I am what

you might call a well-educated woman. My father was a barrister, and sufficiently successful to be able to send me to a good school—St. Andrew's, in fact. When I finished there I went on to Girton, and was supposed to distinguish myself. You have some idea of what Girton is, and how a number of girls will talk when they get together. I got mixed up with what was called the advanced set, and we discussed in our own way what a woman's life ought to be. We greatly believed in woman's rights, and we scorned the idea that a woman should in any way live a life inferior to that of a man. Of course, we were angry that we could not take our degrees in the same way men could, however much we might be superior to them in intelligence and attainments.

"We claimed that no position should be open to a man which was not also open to a woman. In the abstract, I suppose, we were right. Anyhow, my mind was filled with all that sort of thoughts. A number of us laughed at marriage. We scorned the idea that any woman should give herself to a man. Indeed, there were many who declared that marriage was a defunct institution, and that while it might be necessary in a condition of serfdom, it was an outrage in these days of intellectual advancement. You understand the sort of thing I am referring to. I suppose I was among the most advanced of our little coterie. I scorned the idea of falling in love, and laughed at marriage."

She hesitated a little while, and then said with a nervous laugh: "I'm afraid I am boring you, aren't I?"

"Oh, no!" cried Eleanor. "I am deeply interested."

"When I was twenty-two," went on Miss Statham, "a man proposed to me."

"Did you like him?" asked Eleanor, as Miss Statham again hesitated.

"I suppose I did—yes, I am sure I did; he was a nice fellow. He took his degree in the year I was a fresher,

and went to the bar. He was not brilliant—just a plodding, hard-working fellow; but he was a gentleman, and —and I liked him. But I refused him. I calculated the sort of life I should have to live. I knew he would never be a great man. He would earn a few hundreds a year, perhaps a thousand or two, if he were fortunate, but nothing more."

"And you refused him?"

"Yes, I refused him. I asked myself about the future. Why should I be tied to a man who would take me to live in some little suburban villa where I should have to be a household drudge, and the mother of squalling babies? I wanted liberty. I wanted to travel. I wanted to have a career. I wanted to be free from the responsibilities of home life, and, as I said, I refused him. I had professed to scorn the idea of love, and I had accepted what we called our advanced thinking very eagerly."

"Yes, and then?" asked Eleanor with wide-open eyes.

"My mother died when I was about twelve," went on Miss Statham, "and just after Harry Prideaux proposed to me my father died. He was not in the front rank of successful men, but he left me just over two hundred a year—enough to support me. I felt awfully lonely, but I would not lower the flag of the set with which I had become associated,—for we had formed a kind of cult. I had dreamed of taking up some public work, of distinguishing myself by being in the vanguard of some advanced movement. So I settled down to work. I wrote a novel, a kind of problem novel—the thing that was fashionable fifteen years ago. It was not a great success, although it brought me a number of complimentary reviews. Then for a time I edited a weekly paper, the 'New Woman' kind of thing. It died in a few months. Presently Mr. King, who had been a friend of my father's, offered me a post in his firm, and

being at a loose end at the moment, I took it. I suppose I had some aptitude for business, for I was able to please both members of the firm, and got more and more trusted. It is not much of a story, is it?" and she laughed a little bitterly.

"It is very interesting," affirmed Eleanor.

"Of course, I had other offers of marriage," went on Miss Statham, "but I did not regard them seriously. What love I had had been given to Harry Prideaux, and I had refused him."

A silence fell between the two women, a silence which was almost painful. Presently, however, Miss Statham burst out almost angrily:

"Why have I told you this? I am a middle-aged woman now. In three years I shall be forty, with my youth, and whatever beauty I had, all gone, while you are a young girl just over twenty. Why should I bore you?"

"But you are not boring me!" cried Eleanor.

Miss Statham started to her feet, walked to a window, pulled aside the curtain, and looked out into the night. Then she came back.

"Miss Trelawney," she said, "I am telling you this because I have been a fool! Oh, such a fool!"

Eleanor was silent. She did not know what to say.

"Yes, I suppose I have been a successful woman," went on Miss Statham. "I have a position of trust and responsibility; I earn a big income. In a way I am interested, deeply interested, in the enterprises of the firm. There is nothing sordid about them, they touch the big things of life; they bring me into contact with people who occupy high places. I have a great deal of liberty, too. Sometimes I travel. More than once the partners have commissioned me to go abroad and deal with big things. For two months in the year I can do pretty much as I like, and during the past few years I have gone to the

most interesting places in the world. I am a member of the best woman's club in London, and having the advantage of a good name, and being what is called well-connected, I am invited to all sorts of good houses. As you see, I have surrounded myself with pretty things; I can afford to do so. Mr. Sparling and Mr. King, who, in spite of their old-fashioned ideas, are both broad-minded men, pay me just as they would pay a man in my position, and if I wanted more money I could have it. I live, as you see, in comfort. I have no need to trouble about money at all; and yet, Miss Trelawney, I am not happy, and I have been a fool."

"Why? How?" asked the girl.

"Because I would give it all up, gladly give it up to be in that suburban villa I used to scorn, the drudge of a man, the mother of squalling youngsters! I would give anything now to see little children coming into a room, putting their arms round my neck, and calling me mother. I would give years of my life to be the house frau that I used to despise."

"But think of your position! your freedom!" persisted Eleanor.

"Position! Freedom!" cried Miss Statham. "What is it worth? What are my prospects? What have I to look forward to? I am thirty-seven. In a few more years I shall want to retire. Well, I shall be able to do so in comfort; but what then? What are the prospects of a loveless old maid? What lies at the end of it all? What is the value of all this silly jargon about careers for women? Mind, in a way, it's all right. I fully believe that careers should be open to women, and there are some women who are obliged to live single lives, but speaking for myself, I have played a fool. I have realized through the years that I *did* love Harry Prideaux. Oh, yes, he's still alive—he's married for that matter—and I suppose has difficulty in making both ends meet; but he is happy,

His children are growing up around him. He has all the amenities of home life, and his wife—I met her some time ago, her dress was a little shabby—but I knew by the light in her eyes that she possessed the secret of which I knew nothing. Why did you leave home, Miss Trelawney?" The question came out like a pistol shot.

"Because—oh, I wanted to be free," replied Eleanor. "Because I had contracted all sorts of ideas during the war, and I hated the restrictions of home life. You know how things have been, these last few years."

"I met your father some time ago," said Miss Statham, "one of the most delightful men I think I ever saw."

Eleanor was silent.

"I imagine that he was somewhat of a stickler for old-time views, though?" and Miss Statham watched her companion closely as she spoke.

"Yes," replied Eleanor; "you see he had been away from home for several years, and while he was away new ideas came to the front. Conventions are broken down, the custom of a girl having a chaperon when she goes to a dance is laughed at, girls demand latch-keys and resent being questioned as to where they have been, and what they have been doing."

"And I suppose when your father came home he insisted on—on home discipline?"

"I suppose, in his way, he was very kind," said Eleanor slowly, "but he would have obedience. He forbade certain of my friends to come to the house. He would not consent to my going to a dance, except in accordance with his ideas. He protested against girls going out to supper with men after theatres. He—but, oh, you know the kind of thing!"

"So you left home?"

"Yes, I left home."

"*And what is* it all worth?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean your so-called liberty, Miss Trelawney. Isn't home life, the comforts and the refinements and the love of home life a thousand times more than—than what you have got?"

"Have you heard anything about me?" asked Eleanor.

"Not much, but Mr. Spurling told me you had left home, and that you had asked him not to write to your father. It was easy to guess the rest. I can see the kind of girl you are. But, Miss Trelawney, when you have said all that can be said about the higher education of women, and careers for women, and all that sort of thing, the true career for a woman is to be married to a good man, to have the cares of a home, and to become the mother of children. There is nothing higher, nothing holier in all the wide world.

"Oh, if I only had a home, and brothers, and sisters, and—and children! I tell you it's not only insanity, but rank blasphemy to talk as some do about marriage. I have heard women talk about their right to have children without marriage ties. All that sort of thing was born in hell! I have thought about it all, heard all the arguments about it, and I tell you, marriage is a sacred thing, and if ever it is destroyed the best things in life will be destroyed. Oh, God, what fools we women are!—especially those of us who are called intellectual! Have you any religion, Miss Trelawney?"

Eleanor made no reply.

"It's all part of the same thing. We women think we know better than God; think we can do without God, and all the rest follows. After all, the happiest people in the world, and the most useful people in the world are those who find new avenues of usefulness along old paths."

For hours they talked; the woman of thirty-seven and the girl of twenty-two. No further reference was made

to Eleanor's leaving home, yet every word the other spoke made Eleanor realize the inwardness of what she had done, and presently when she made her way back to St. Hildebrand's Mansions she was in a very thoughtful mood.

The next day Peggy came to see her, and after taking her to the theatre, the two girls had returned to Eleanor's rooms and had talked long and earnestly together. She did not tell Peggy a word about her visit to Miss Statham, in fact she had been extremely reticent about her own thoughts and feelings. Nevertheless after she had gone and she found herself alone she sat for a long time thinking hard and wonderingly. When Miss Honeywood came back she wondered at Eleanor's silence, wondered, too, at the strange look in her eyes.

"What are you doing to-day, Miss Trelawney?" asked Miss Honeywood on the Sunday morning.

"Nothing in particular," replied Eleanor. "Why?"

"My cousins have asked me to go and stay with them at their house at Enfield, and I thought you might like to come with me. They have often asked me to bring you to see them."

"It's awfully good of them," Eleanor made answer, "but not to-day, thank you. I don't feel in the humour for seeing people. I think I want to be alone."

When Miss Honeywood left, however, the girl found herself in a very unsettled frame of mind. Miss Statham's words haunted her. Of what use, after all, was the freedom she had gained? It was not as though she had no home, and was obliged to live as she was doing. Had that been the case, she thought she could have been tolerably content; but in spite of everything, the thought of home made a strong appeal to her. She could not help remembering what Miss Statham had said about her father. Yes, in a way she was proud of him. He might be a little puritanical; but he was a gentleman still, a

gentleman of the highest order. He was lovable, too. In her antagonism to his restrictions she had declared she had not a particle of affection for him, but as she sat thinking about him that morning something seemed to rise up in her heart, something which she could not understand.

Not that she intended to go back. Her pride, if nothing else, forbade that. She could not conceive herself confessing that she had made a mistake. And yet, and yet —— Where was Rod Ravenscroft? she wondered. Since that morning after the awful night which she still shuddered to think about, she had never seen him, never heard of him. Of course he had forgotten her. Probably he had become engaged to that girl she had seen him with on Hampstead Heath, or if not her, another. Oh, what a fool, what a blind fool she had been! Her heart ached at the thought of living her life without him; and yet she would have to.

Suppose she should succeed even as Miss Statham had succeeded, and suppose she were to receive a salary sufficient to enable her to live amidst such surroundings as Miss Statham lived—what then?

Then the other side rose up before her. After all, marriage was a sordid, miserable thing, and men in the main were brutes. Peggy had married the man she said she loved—yet think of her spending her life with such a creature as Barnes! Think of the intimate associations which a wife must have with such a husband! The thought was nauseous! And all men were essentially the same. Mean, selfish, mere animals who looked upon women as their playthings. No, on the whole she was glad of what she had done. She, Eleanor Trelawney, could never become the orthodox wife. She could never submit to a lifetime association with any man, even although her heart were at that moment aching for Rod Ravenscroft.

She took a book from a shelf and tried to read, but the thing would not hold her attention; she found her mind wandering. What was Peggy doing? she wondered. The child's misery had saddened her, and she instinctively felt how Peggy loathed the thought of going back to Primrose Terrace. She herself became heavy-hearted and miserable at the thought of it.

She threw aside the book. She could not stay indoors. But where could she go? The day was a wild and stormy one, and the dark clouds which had swept across the sky were in accord with her feelings.

Yes, she felt anxious about Peggy. Somehow or another, she was possessed with the idea that all was not right, that something more than ordinary had happened. She remembered, half with a laugh of amusement, and half with a feeling of disgust, her experiences at Primrose Terrace, and she could not think of going there again. All the same, when afternoon came she made her way towards the tube that would take her to Camden Town. Yes, she felt she must go. She wanted to assure herself that no harm had happened to her sister.

A little later she stood at the door of 13, Primrose Terrace, and knocked. There was no reply. She knocked again and again, still there was no answer. The house was empty. What could it mean? She was about to turn away when the door of the adjoining house was opened.

"You want to see Mrs. Barnes?" asked a slatternly woman.

"I want to see young Mrs. Barnes, yes."

"Well, she ain't here. Mrs. Barnes and the girls are gone away for a bit of an 'oliday. Where Jim Barnes is I don't know. Are you the sister of the young lady what married Jim Barnes?"

"Yes."

"Well, then you can't see 'er," and the woman laughed meaningly.

"I don't understand," said Eleanor. "Is there anything wrong?"

"It is not for me to say nothink, although I am a next door neighbour: but perhaps I ought to tell you. Young Mrs. Barnes went out yesterday about 'alf-past one, and no sooner 'ad she gone than Mrs. Barnes and the girls left the 'ouse. Mrs. Barnes says to me, 'Mrs. Simpkins,' she says, 'me and the girls are going off for a bit of an 'oliday, and we shan't be back for a few days, while Jim is off on his own. If that young minx of a wife of his comes here knocking, as I expect she will, you can give her this letter. It will give her full explanation,' she says."

"But—but —— What do you mean?" asked Eleanor.

"I'm telling you as fast as I can. I went out to the movies last night. Went out about eight and didn't come back until after ten. I 'adn't been back long when I 'eard the knocker of number 13 going like anythink, so I just opened the door, and there was your sister. It would seem that she didn't know anythink about Mrs. Barnes and the girls going away, for when I told her, she seemed all stunned like. I guv her the note which Mrs. Barnes had left, and that's all: at least that's all I know for certain, although I've me thoughts. I ain't lived here for nothink. Mrs. Barnes 'ave told me a lot, she 'ave. More than once she says to me, 'Jim's wife may be a lady,' she says, 'and 'ave a lot of aristocratic connections,' she says, 'but she don't bring a penny with 'er, and Jim ain't going to stand 'er tantrums.' When she came 'ere first, Mrs. Barnes kind of crowed it over me, and made out that she was superior to me, and was going to be invited to the General's 'ouse and all that sort of thing; but I told 'er what I thought then, I did, and when

I sees 'ow things were going on, and 'eard what the girls said, I was able to put two and two together, I was."

"But you gave my sister a note?"

"Yes, I give it to 'er just as it was guv to me. I'm a respectable woman, I am, and didn't open it, nor nothink."

"And she? What did she say?"

"She didn't say nothink. She seemed all stunned-like, and as she 'ad never been friendly with me, I just closed the door as soon as I give 'er the letter."

"Is that all you know?" asked Eleanor.

"Well, it is and it isn't. Just out of curiosity-like, I opened the door again, and watched 'er and I see 'er go down the steps and walk away by 'erself. She didn't seem to know where she was going or what she was doing. Then I see 'er stand under that lamp-post, and read the letter I guv 'er. I watched 'er for two or three minutes while she stood there, and then she kind of staggered away."

"And is that all you know?"

"That's all I know. It wasn't my business, and she never even condescended to speak to me, so why should I trouble? But I 'ave me thoughts all the same."

Eleanor left Primrose Terrace almost frenzied with anxiety. She had heard enough to tell her the whole miserable story. What had happened was evident. But what had become of Peggy? Where had she gone? She had a few shillings in her pocket, she knew. She had given her some money herself. But where had she gone? What had she done? If the Barnes' door was closed against her where could she go? Where had she passed the night?

The thought of Peggy wandering through the miserable streets of Camden Town late at night, homeless and

friendless, was horrible to contemplate; and yet that was what must have happened to her!

Almost unconsciously she made her way back to St. Hildebrand's Mansions. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think out the whole situation.

The thought was maddening! Peggy, her sister, to be placed in such an awful predicament! She, a young girl, to be homeless, friendless, deserted. She thought she saw the reason why Peggy had not come to her. She was too proud, too ashamed to confess the ghastly truth.

She dismissed the thought that Peggy had gone home to Hampstead, with scarcely a moment's consideration. She remembered that her sister had said, only the previous night, that she could never go home again. But where was she? That was the thought which haunted her with ghastly persistency.

She made herself a cup of tea, and then, having hurriedly swallowed it, went out again. The room seemed to stifle her. Presently she found herself in Holborn. Sunday evening though it was, 'buses rushed thither and thither, while pedestrians thronged the sidewalks. Unheeding whither she went she turned her face eastward and presently found herself in the city. She had no reason for going there; she simply followed a blind impulse. The traffic was much thinner here, and she was able to think more calmly. As she walked, the church bells began to ring. They were calling the people to worship. She had told herself again and again that that kind of thing had no meaning to her, that it had gone with a hundred other effete institutions; and yet these church bells had a meaning. All over the land they would be ringing, calling the people to prayer. There was something beautiful in the thought, in spite of everything. Why should one pray? And why was it that what people called religion still appealed to people when intellectually they had given up the creeds of their fa-

thers? Of course, too, religion was associated with some ethical code, and after all, the best and the most thoughtful people in the world had declared their need of it. She, Eleanor Trelawney, was a living being, with all sorts of hopes and longings, and desires. What was life after all? What did it mean? Was there anything after death?

Of what she saw and heard during her walk back to St. Hildebrand's Mansions she knew nothing, cared nothing. When she saw the great block of buildings, of which her little rooms formed a tiny part, she almost shuddered. It might be hours before Miss Honeywood would return. How could she bear to pass the time alone? She entered the vestibule with a heartache such as she thought she had never felt before, and then suddenly she started back like one afraid. The place was dimly lit, and the man who attended the lift did not appear to be near, but she had a kind of consciousness that she was being watched.

"Eleanor! It is you, isn't it?"

It was Peggy's voice.

"Peggy!" the word was a gasp. "Is—is it *you?*"

"Yes!—can't you see?"

Then the flood-gates of Eleanor's heart were opened, and throwing her arms round her sister's neck she sobbed convulsively.

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" she cried; but why she said it she did not know.

CHAPTER XXXII

PEGGY PLEADS WITH ELEANOR

THEY were seated alone in Eleanor's room. Peggy had thrown off her hat and jacket, while Eleanor looked at her again and again as if to assure herself that it was really her sister.

Perhaps she had not yet recovered from the experiences of the day, but she could not understand the look in Peggy's eyes. She had feared that some awful calamity had befallen her. Even now she was afraid of the revelations which might be made to her. That was why she wondered at the look of joy which she saw.

"Peggy! tell me!" she cried. "I don't know why it was, but I went up to that awful place to see you this afternoon, and the door was locked, and the woman in the next house told me such a horrible story! Tell me, where have you been? What has happened? What is the meaning of it all?"

"Don't you know?" cried Peggy. "But of course you don't;—how could you? I forgot!"

And then the child poured out the miserable story of the past few months; told of the things about which she had, in the past, been silent; showed her sister her heart.

"I didn't know anything could be so horrible," she sobbed. "Oh, I was mad! I did not understand, I did not realize! But I had not been married to him long before I—I saw what he was; knew what it was to be the wife of such —— You don't know, Eleanor! you—can't think! But still I fought on. I would not give in. I would not confess that I had made a mistake. I said I

would be loyal to him, and—and all the time,—oh! I can't tell you! You know what it was like on that Sunday afternoon,—the kind of house, the kind of people. When I got back last night, the place was empty, and that horrid woman told me that Mrs. Barnes and her daughters had gone away, and then she gave me a letter. Here it is—read it."

"And you know no more than this?" asked Eleanor after she had read.

The child shook her head.

"But what did you do? How did you spend the night? Why didn't you come back here?"

"I didn't know what to do. I think I was mad. I remember wandering round the streets not knowing where I was going. If I thought anything at all it was that I would find my way to the river and throw myself in. I did not feel as though I could come to you, somehow. I didn't think you would understand; but I kept on walking, walking, and then suddenly I found myself on Hampstead Heath, and—and——"

"Yes?" cried Eleanor eagerly.

"I don't know how it was, but I heard myself saying 'I will arise and go to my father,' and—and I found myself at home!—And there was a light in the window—and I rushed to the door, and Dad came out and brought me in! Oh, Eleanor, Eleanor!"

"Then you went home?"

"I couldn't help it. Do you know what he said to me when he came that morning I told you about? 'The door will be always open to you, Peg,' and his words have remained in my memory ever since."

"And they received you kindly?"

"Oh, Eleanor, you don't know! You can't think how good Dad is, or how beautiful he was. Of course, in a way, I expected that Mother would;—but, oh, Dad was *just lovely!* He took me on his knee just as he did years

ago, and I found myself with my arms round his neck telling him everything."

For a moment, a feeling of anger shot into Eleanor's heart. A sense of pride rose up within her, a horror of failure.

"Then you swallowed your pride?" she found herself saying.

"Eleanor, what pride had I? What had I to be proud about? Why, as you know, I had been a bad, wicked girl:—we both had; and—and I could not help going home. Oh, if you knew how splendid Dad is! Why,—why,—in spite of everything, I went to sleep feeling happy. Just the knowledge that I was in my own bed again, and that I was home, and—do you know when Dad came into the room and knelt down by me and said, 'God bless you, my little Peg,' I felt as though—oh, I can't tell you what I felt! It's all been so horrible, and I've been so wicked! but I am glad I went home."

"Then you've gone home to stay?"

"Where else could I go? Besides, after all that common, tawdry, shabby vulgarity, to find myself at home where things were beautiful and—and pure, and clean, it was just heaven. I don't know how it was, but last night when I read that letter, something seemed to break, and I—saw things as they really were. I—I—oh, how could I have done it, Eleanor?"

"And you have come from home now?" said her sister, bewildered at what had taken place, and hardly understanding Peggy's incoherent story.

"Yes," the child replied; "and do you know I did not wake until midday to-day, and it was all so beautiful. And then Trev came home quite unexpectedly. He isn't going back to Ireland again, and of course it was all so wonderful. You see Trev's so changed. And then he insisted on bringing Mary Penryn—that's the girl he's engaged to, and—and I think I forgot everything except

my own happiness. All those horrible months seemed as though they never existed, and they were all so good to me, Eleanor. Mary Penryn is just lovely—no wonder Trev's fond of her. No one upbraided me, and they have been so kind. Oh, it has all been so wonderful, so horrible, and yet so beautiful. I hardly know what I'm saying!—Then Trev mentioned your name, and immediately I felt I must come and tell you. Dad wanted to come with me; but I wouldn't let him. Then John insisted that he would come; but I felt as though it wouldn't be right, somehow. I wanted to see you myself, and I told them that I would come alone. And when I got here you were gone. But I wouldn't go away. I knew you would be home some time, so I said I'd wait. And I have waited, you see. I could not help coming for you, dear."

"Coming for me?"

"Yes, coming for *you*, for of course you're coming back with me."

Eleanor shook her head. "No," she replied. "I can't do that."

"But why? They are waiting for you."

"How do you know? Did they tell you anything?"

"Oh, you really must come home with me, you must."

"And confess myself a failure? No, I won't."

"You can't mean that?"

"Yes, I do," the girl spoke defiantly. "Now I know you are safe, I shall be all right. Perhaps it was right for you to go home—you—you are different, but I cannot do it."

In vain Peggy pleaded with her. Eleanor longed to do what her sister asked; her heart ached for a sight of her father and mother, but something forbade her. Her pride rose in revolt. She could not go back and confess she had been wrong—for she knew she *had* been wrong. But to go back and confess it was too humiliating.

"Then I suppose I must go without you," said Peggy

sadly. "Or they will be thinking that something has happened to me, and I did hope you'd come with me!"

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and a man who was employed by the owner of the flat appeared.

"A telephone message for you, Miss."

"Yes, what is it?"

"It's from Miss Honeywood, Miss. She 'phoned to say that her friends at Enfield wanted her to stay the night, and thinking you wouldn't mind, she consented. That's all, Miss."

"There now," cried Peggy when the man had gone, "you can't stay here after that! Oh, Eleanor, why be lonely and miserable?"

"I am not lonely, and I am not miserable," replied the girl. "I have my work to do, and I am going to live my own life. Do you know, Peg, I have got a splendid position, and I shall have all sorts of opportunities for advancement."

"But—but ——"

"It's no use talking, I'm not going back."

Peggy made her way to the door. "Good-night, dear. Is there any message you would like me to give them at home?"

Eleanor shook her head.

"Shall I ask Trev to bring Mary Penryn here? I know you'd like her."

Again she shook her head.

"There's nothing you'd like me to say to Dad and Mother, is there?"

"No."

"Then 'good-night.'"

There was something pathetic in the child's tone, something which appealed to Eleanor strongly. A great weight had been lifted from her heart to know that Peggy was safe, and yet, as she realized that her sister's

life had been ruined, that the past few months had meant, and must ever mean, an irreparable tragedy in her life, she felt a horrible remorse. It was her fault. Peggy had been greatly under her influence, and had she acted differently her sister's life might have been saved. But because she had been under the spell of such women as Tamsin Cory, and had listened to her unhealthy talk, she had allowed Peggy to go her own way, and this was the result of it.

Still, she steeled her heart against her sister's pleading. She could not, no, she simply could not go back to her home after all that had taken place.

She opened the door and Peggy passed out on to the landing. As she did so, a sense of utter desolation swept over her. Peggy would go home while she would be left there in loneliness. After all, what had she to stay away for? What had she gained by *going* away? And—and was not Peggy right? Hadn't she, too, been a bad girl? Her heart ached with a great hunger. She longed for the life she had forsaken, longed with an unutterable longing. Why should she stay there in loneliness, and misery? Besides, it was her duty to go home.

At that moment she realized something of what her father and mother must have felt because of her action. Perhaps they had spent sleepless nights thinking about her and Peggy, and she had been careless, indifferent about them. She had thought only of herself, nothing of her duty.

"Honour thy father and thy mother." The words came to her mind.

All the influences of her early years were at work. All those things which she had learnt when her mother taught her to say her simple prayers. Her innermost soul was calling out for something which she had discarded, forgotten, and yet which was the great secret of life.

It all came like a flash, and although it has taken me some time even to suggest her feelings, Peggy had scarcely passed from the door before the truth came to her.

"Peggy!" she called, and the word was like a gasp.

"Yes, dear, what is it?"

"I'll—I'll go with you! Wait! No, no, don't say anything, I can't bear it! But wait!"

Almost feverishly she put on her hat and jacket, and they left St. Hildebrand's Mansions, and went into the street.

"Dad told me——" began Peggy.

"No! no! don't speak," interrupted Eleanor. "There, —there's a taxi."

Almost frantically she stopped the driver, who drew up at the curb.

Neither of the two girls spoke a word as the taxi made its way towards Hampstead, but Peggy, who had nestled close to her sister's side, sobbed quietly. As for Eleanor, she sat perfectly still, gazing with unseeing eyes into the streets.

The taxi had barely reached the door of General Trelawney's house when it opened. It might seem as though some one were waiting, listening.

"Hello, Peg, you've got back. Splendid!" It was the General's voice. "And you too, Eleanor! Splendid. Run in, will you? I'll pay the man."

A minute later the General entered the house and saw Eleanor standing in the hall alone. He was an understanding man, and knew that what might appeal to Peggy, and for that matter was absolutely necessary to her, would be repugnant to his other girl. The two were entirely different. Peggy was impulsive, emotional, easily moved, quick to manifest her feelings. Eleanor, on the other hand, was outwardly cold. She dreaded scenes. She was not given to evidence her feelings.

For a few seconds the two stood looking at each other as if trying to read each the other's thoughts. The father saw that his eldest daughter's eyes were hard and defiant, even while they were yearning; saw that she was fighting a great battle, and that a wrong word on his part might do infinite harm.

"Eleanor, my dear," he said, "I *am* glad to see you. This is simply splendid! You have just come in time for supper, too."

Not a word of reproach, not a suggestion that she had come back as a disobedient child: only a glad welcome—just as though she had been away for a long holiday and had returned. She did not speak, she could not, but she seemed to be waiting for something. What, neither of them could have told.

Then the General, scarcely knowing what he was doing, held out his arms, and the girl, almost as unconsciously, threw herself into them.

"Dad," she said, "it's awfully hard for you; but will you forgive me?"

"There, there," cried the father, "it's beautiful to see you home again, my dear. Ah, Alice, there you are. Eleanor's come just in time for supper."

It was all so natural, yet so wonderful. Instinctively she knew what her father felt, knew of the thoughts which were surging through his mind at that moment, realized the nightmare of the last few months, and yet he never hinted at it. He seemed to know by some wonderful wizardry what her feelings were: knew that she could not bear the words which might seem natural under the circumstances. And because she understood she felt as though a great healing power had passed over her. It was as though the thought of his love, although she felt more than ever her own wrong-doing, brought joy instead of reproach in her home-coming.

Yes, Peggy was right. Her father was wonderful,

and she knew, as she had never known before, what a daughter's love meant. Somehow the crust which had encased her heart was broken, and the cold pride in which she had rather gloried was melted.

How it was she could not tell, but Eleanor felt like a new girl. For the first time in years she wanted some manifestation of affection, wanted to hear words of tenderness.

"But, Dad," she said, "you'll try to forgive me, won't you?—And, oh, I do love you!" There was a catch in her voice as she spoke and the General felt the tears well into his eyes.

"But not as much as I love you, dear. Not half. But there, it's splendid to have you home."

A few minutes later Eleanor had recovered herself. She wondered how she could have so given way to her feelings, but she was not a bit ashamed of them. Some strange alchemy had been at work that had changed everything.

Then there was Eleanor's meeting with her brothers and Mary Penryn. Everything passed off in the most ordinary way. It might seem as though everything had been arranged beforehand, and the General had told his children what they were and were not to say. But this was not so. He simply knew how to lead the conversation into right channels, knew by a kind of instinct and intuition what words ought to be said.

Nevertheless the joy of it all was beyond words. Instinctively the General's mind swept back to that first Sunday night after those long years of absence, and he realized what that night had meant in their lives. Realized the antagonism which existed, and how it had embittered the whole of the succeeding months, and must throw a dark shadow upon the future of all of them. But he said no word about it. Words would be worse

than useless at such a time. What he felt may be guessed but cannot be described.

"For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful," repeated the General, as they sat down to supper.

Old-time words, repeated ofttimes without meaning; yet somehow each felt them to be something more than a mere matter of form as they passed his lips. The whole atmosphere of the place was that of thanksgiving, and quiet joy.

"What do you think of Mary?" asked Trev, who sat next to her at the supper table. "Isn't she fine? I tell you I'm the luckiest beggar in the world. I shall be able to see her nearly every day now. You do like Mary, don't you?"

"Of course I do, Trev; she's a dear, sweet girl."

"I knew you'd say so," cried Trev, with all the fervour of a young lover. "I can't get over it, you know."

"Get over what?"

"What she should see in me. And, do you know, things are turning out splendidly, too. I was made Captain during the war, and then afterwards I went down the scale, and had to be contented with being Lieutenant; but they are putting me back again."

"Back again? What do you mean?"

"I'm Captain permanently now. Mary's mightily pleased, I can tell you, and as for her father—you must meet the Squire; he's just the bluff old chap that one reads about in stories. But he's nothing to Dad. Isn't Dad great? Do you know when I saw him first I was awfully proud of him, but—but——"

"I know," replied Eleanor.

Oh, how beautiful it was to be among her own people again, to breathe the atmosphere of refinement, and understanding. She had felt afraid. All sorts of forebodings had filled her mind. More than once on her way to

the house she was on the point of telling the driver to stop. But her father had made the difficult places easy. With his old-fashioned courtesy, and his wonderful knowledge, he had made everything so easy for her. She did not deserve it. She knew she did not deserve it, and while his kindness made her past disobedience harder for her to bear, she felt thankful for it.

There were only two awkward situations during the whole evening. One was when the clock was striking ten, and she had declared that she must go back to St. Hildebrand's Mansions.

"Back to that place, my dear. But why?" asked the General. "Isn't your room ready? Alice, isn't Eleanor's room ready?"

"Certainly it is."

"Then, of course, you'll not go back," said the General, as though he took the matter for granted.

"But I must get to business to-morrow morning," she urged.

"Then go to business from here, my dear."

He took her position at Spurling and King's as a matter of course, and whatever he may have felt about it, he offered no opinion.

"Do you really want me to stay, Dad?" and she spoke to him in a husky voice.

"Want you to stay? Why, Eleanor!"

That was all, but it was enough; and Eleanor, although she felt everything differently from Peggy, realized that she was at home, and that the old foolish wicked past was as if it had never taken place.

The other awkward situation was when, shortly after ten o'clock, Rod Ravenscroft was ushered into the room where the family were sitting.

Eleanor had expected nothing of the sort, and so when, without warning of any sort, he stood before her, she felt as though she could not speak.

Ravenscroft, who had not seen her at first, spoke to Mrs. Trelawney, then to the General, after which his eyes swept quickly round the room. Seeing Peggy he moved towards her, but no sooner did he catch sight of Eleanor than he stood still, as if not knowing what to do. For a moment an awkward silence prevailed, but the General, with that keen intuition which made him understand what ought to be done, spoke as naturally as if nothing had taken place.

"Yes, we're all glad to see you, Rod!" he cried. "It's the first time we have all met together since I left home, years ago. Isn't it lucky that Trev should be able to come home, and find Eleanor and Peg here? I think you have met Miss Penryn? Yes, I see you have. A good job for you that you approve of his engagement. If you hadn't there would have been pistols for two and coffee for one to-morrow morning. Ah, Trev is a lucky young beggar! Splendid, isn't it?"

This speech of the General's gave the two girls time to recover themselves, and enabled Ravenscroft to act naturally.

For the next hour, laughter and good feeling abounded. Both the General and Mrs. Trelawney seemed to be as light-hearted as children, while from John's eyes a light shone which told how happy he was.

"By the way, John," said Ravenscroft, "I really called in about that patent of yours. It's all right. Nothing like it has been placed on the market, and the patent is as sound as a bell."

"Splendid," laughed the General. "What a good thing it is to have a friend who is a lawyer, and especially as he happens to be specializing in Patent Acts."

"It's going to be a great thing, General," said Ravenscroft. "Any one to look at John wouldn't think he's got it in him, would they?"

At this there was general laughter, especially as boy looked shy and confused.

"No use blushing, John," cried the General. "Y can't keep it a secret any longer. The engineering wor will soon be shaken to its foundations, while motorist everywhere will be talking of 'Trelawney's Non-gea Changing Invention.'"

"Yes, John's going to be a millionaire," laughed Ravenscroft. "On every hand there will be a demand for the thing, and he's going to have a royalty on every one that's sold. No, John, old chap, I'm not going to tell how much. Somebody will be telling secrets to the Income Tax people. Think of John having to pay Super Tax! You'll have to get married, old chap. I hear there's going to be a big percentage taken off in the case of married men."

"Also reduction for each child!" shouted Trev. "Look here, John, it isn't fair, old man. Here shall I be a poor soldier, with a Captain's pay, while you will be rolling in riches."

"And where will the poor barrister come in?" asked Ravenscroft.

"No need to trouble about lawyers," retorted John quietly; "they always manage to annex a big share of the booty."

But, although no apparent notice was taken of the return of Eleanor and Peg, the influence of that return was felt by every one, and Ravenscroft, who did not know of all the circumstances, found himself wondering as to the meaning of what had taken place. Presently, however, just as he was leaving, he had an opportunity to be with Eleanor alone.

"I want to see you very much," he said, "to see you alone. May I?"

"I am at business all through the day," she managed to reply.

"Are you going to retain your post?" he stammered.

"Certainly," was her reply.

"But you leave Spurling and King's at half-past five. You'll be free after that time."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind that, I know you will be. Shall I find you here to-morrow at half-past six?"

"Perhaps," and her reply was almost a whisper.

"Oh, Eleanor!" cried Peggy as the two girls sat alone in the latter's room later, "if—if I had only known!"

Her sister was silent.

"In a way I'm so happy," sobbed the child, "and yet it's all so ghastly."

Still Eleanor did not reply. She knew what was in the other's heart.

"To think that I ever became the wife of that man! To think that —— Oh, Eleanor, I can't bear it! And I've my life all before me, too. Isn't there some way out of it, I wonder?"

"If there is, Dad will find it," was Eleanor's reply.

"Yes," cried Peggy, "there's always Dad, isn't there? And if—if he only could—if he only could!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

LOVE WINS OUT

ROD RAVENSCROFT had hurried to Duloe immediately after his day's work was over, and found his heart beating wildly as he was ushered into an empty room.

"General Trelawney is not yet home, sir," the servant told him. "Neither is Mr. John. Mrs. Trelawney has gone out for a ride with Captain Trelawney and Miss Peggy."

"But Miss Trelawney is at home, isn't she?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, she came in a few minutes ago."

"Will you ask her whether she will see me?"

The servant left the room with a meaning smile on her lips. Perhaps she guessed what was in the young fellow's heart.

When Eleanor entered the room he saw that her face was very pale, and that her eyes had a cold, unnatural look.

For a few seconds they regarded each other in silence. It seemed as though neither was able to speak.

"I couldn't help coming," Ravenscroft managed to say at length. "I—I wanted to tell you how glad I am,—for you have come home for good now, haven't you?"

"I don't know," replied Eleanor.

"But of course you have, and I'm so glad."

"But why should you be?" she asked coldly. She had difficulty in restraining her feelings. Her nerves seemed raw. Her whole being was wrought up to an unnatural pitch.

"Surely, surely you know," was his response.

"I'm afraid you give me credit for more knowledge than I possess," was her response. "But I forgot; I want to congratulate you on your engagement."

"On my engagement! What engagement?"

"I was informed to-day that you were engaged to Miss Ongar, the only daughter of Mr. Fleming Ongar, K. C., the famous barrister. Did I see you with her on the Heath here, some time ago? Ah, I see it was she. Well, I congratulate you."

"Your congratulations are premature," was his reply.

"Why, isn't it settled yet?" She was able to speak calmly and coldly now, as though nothing had passed between them.

"No, it's not settled," replied Ravenscroft.

"Have I spoken too soon? I'm sorry. I was told you were engaged."

"I'm not," he replied. "But—but I want to be, Eleanor. Don't you understand?"

"Understand what?"

"There is only one girl in the world I can become engaged to, and her name is not Ongar. I want to be engaged to her. I mean to be, too, if she'll have me. That's why I am so glad you have come home. Don't you understand?"

Eleanor was silent. Something rose up within her which seemed to destroy all power of speech; but there was a glad look in her eyes.

"I don't know who told you such a silly story," went on Ravenscroft. "I never thought of Miss Ongar in such a connection. How could I? There's only one girl in all the world for me, and her name is Eleanor Trelawney. Can't we begin again where we broke off, nearly a year ago?"

"I—I don't understand."

"*Oh, yes, you do.* That's why I'm so glad, and more

than glad, that you have come home. It's been a nightmare, hasn't it? I was horribly pained, but I couldn't help loving you all the time. I say, can't we begin again?"

"But how can we when—when——"

"Everything is possible now, Eleanor, if you love me," pleaded the young fellow. "Everything. If you had stayed away nothing could have been possible, but now—now you've come home—I say, I know I'm a bungling fool. I was months ago, just before you left home, but I do love you, and—and, I say, tell me I'm not mistaken. Tell me I haven't been thinking what can't be. For I want you, my dear, I want you, heaven only knows how much!"

Her heart was throbbing wildly, throbbing with joy such as she had never felt before.

"But—but that awful night," she began to stammer.

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. That's nothing. You can tell me as much, or as little as you please about that. I know that was only a part of the foolish business of your leaving home. But that never really troubled me. I always knew you were not that kind of girl."

"Did you? You're sure?"

"Of course I did."

"Oh, I am ashamed!" cried the girl. "I must have been mad. No, no, I'm not afraid to tell you everything about it. Thank heaven you were in time to—to see me back safely——" she ended tamely.

"And—and you care for me, dear?" There was a tremor in his voice.

She nodded her head.

"Yes, yes, but *that* way! I want to hear you say so."

"Yes," was her reply. "But oh, I shall never forgive myself, never."

"For what?"

"For my madness, for my disobedience to—to my father. It's made everything impossible."

"No, no," laughed Ravenscroft, "nothing is impossible now."

"But it is. No, I've done nothing wrong, and yet, somehow, I feel my life has been sullied, as though I'm not worthy of anything beautiful and good."

"But you love me? Tell me that again."

"Yes, I—I love you."

"Then you'll marry me?"

"No, no, I can't, at least not for a long time. I feel as though I am not worthy, as though I must atone."

"Atone be hanged!" almost shouted Ravenscroft. "There—there, I've got you now. All that mad business is over. It's all over. We're going to begin anew. You have come back home, and we are engaged, you see. No, it's no use your trying to get away! I've got you! We're engaged. You have promised to marry me, and it will have to be soon."

"But I couldn't. I must keep my place at Spurling and King's."

"Hang Spurling and King," laughed Ravenscroft. "They will understand. I know Mr. Spurling well; he's a grand old chap, and when I tell him he'll understand all about it. I could not tell you before, but I got you that place, Eleanor, and now I'm going to take you away from it. You are going to be my wife, do you see? I've told the General all about it, and—and——"

Little by little Eleanor yielded to her heart's promptings, and as one explanation followed another both the man and the girl entered into that joy which, although it may be the lot of all, is ever new, ever wonderful.

"Yes," said the General, late that same night after Ravenscroft had gone back to his home, and Trev had

returned with Mary Penryn to Kensington, "it seems as though my heart is full, Alice. I never expected such joy to come to me."

"It's very wonderful, isn't it?" said Mrs. Trelawney. "Oh, Lester, it seems as though the last few months have been a ghastly nightmare, and we have woke up to find it was only a dream."

"In a way," assented the General, "in a way, yes. We have a great deal to be thankful for, and I trust I am thankful. Perhaps I needed all this to make me understand: perhaps I, too, was forgetting the deep things of life: but it's wonderful. Fancy John turning out a genius: for I'm sure that invention of his will be a success. Bless the boy, I am proud of him! He has been a world of comfort to me; and to you, too, Alice."

"He has, indeed. I don't know what I should have done without him during those dark days. And Trev, too: Trev has become wonderfully changed, hasn't he? What a good girl will do for a young fellow! And he seems so happy, too."

"Who wouldn't be with such a girl as he's got?" laughed the General.

"Were you surprised," said Mrs. Trelawney, "about Eleanor and Ravenscroft?"

"Surprised? not a bit! I knew it all along. Oh, at one time I was terribly afraid. It's come out all right, though. He told me about it to-night. Eleanor insists that she'll go to Spurling and King's for the remainder of the week, but he tells me he has persuaded her to give notice at once. I'm perfectly happy about her now. I had a long talk with them both. I had no idea she was really so affectionate."

"Oh, God has been very good to us! If only little Peggy were—were——" and Mrs. Trelawney's words ended in a sob.

"Yes, yes, I know," said the General sadly. "Nothing

can undo the past as far as Peggy is concerned; and it's a terrible business. Her life will be frightfully saddened no matter what we may do. I cannot save her from the results of her madness. But Peggy's really a better girl now, and in a way is much happier than she was before——"

"Yes, I believe she is," assented the mother. "But oh, my dear, it's awful to think about. She's only nineteen, and—and can't we do something, Lester?"

"Of course I've learnt all about him. There will be no difficulty whatever in getting a divorce. The fellow is not only a bounder and a poisonous creature, but he has openly admitted to me, to-day, before witnesses, that he has given Peggy the right to demand her complete freedom from him. Indeed he wants it, and boasted to me that within three days of his freedom he would marry the woman for whom he gave up Peggy. Just think of it! I had difficulty in restraining myself, difficulty to keep my hands from him! But there, we'll get rid of him with as little publicity as possible, and then Peggy will be free. Perhaps—perhaps, who knows, there may be a happy future for her after all."

"I pray God there may be," sobbed his wife.

"Oh, yes," and the General spoke cheerfully, "and please God there shall be if love can make it so. My little Peg shall be happy; and—and thank God for it, Alice, none of the children were ever so near to us as they are now; never did they love us so much."

"No," replied Mrs. Trelawney, "and knowing that, I am happy in spite of everything."

Printed in the United States of America